

THOMAS, KATHERINE A., D.M.A. Benjamin Britten's Settings of *Moore's Irish Melodies*: Historical and Musical Context and Interpretation for Performance. (2019) Directed by Dr. James Douglass. 79 pp.

Benjamin Britten's musical contributions to the annals of both instrumental and vocal music are significant. During his lifetime and well after, he would be touted as an avante garde composer who pushed the boundaries of the English nationalistic sound, yet others would say he embodied and defined it. Though his glory is often attributed to his impressive operas and large choral works, his folk song settings are often more well-known and accessible in the worlds of art song and vocal pedagogy. In comparison to his four volumes of British folk song arrangements, and one volume of French, his settings of *Moore's Irish Melodies* stand out as particularly sensitive and artful. Their use of harp-like accompaniments plays sophisticatedly against the already lyrical melodies of Thomas Moore, making them both challenging, but accessible, to vocalists of all ages.

While these arrangements may move audiences through their aesthetic, they hold a deeper significance in the context of history. Thomas Moore becomes an active part of the *Melodies'* history and conservation, as opposed to a vague name lost to the sands of time. His contributions of politically charged texts through his *own* arrangements of these preserved ancient Irish melodies carried significant weight in their time.

This study traced the lineage of the Irish melodies and follow their unique path to simultaneous adaptation and conservation, and their role in Irish nationalism. It strove to shed light on the *Melodies'* historical significance in both Moore's and Britten's ages, in addition to offering a musical analysis of Britten's creative settings. This contribution

can aid performers, students, and teachers in creating a deeper understanding of the material.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN'S SETTINGS OF *MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES*:
HISTORICAL AND MUSICAL CONTEXT AND
INTERPRETATION FOR PERFORMANCE

by

Katherine A. Thomas

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Greensboro
2019

Approved by

James Douglass
Committee Chair

© 2019 Katherine A. Thomas

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Katherine A. Thomas, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair James DouglassCommittee Members Gavin Douglas

Robert Wells

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my committee members, who have gifted me with new knowledge and insights throughout my time at UNCG. Their patience and accommodations have made this degree possible.

Special thanks to Doctors Cora Palfy and Julianne Olson. Without their support and guidance, my dream of finishing this massive undertaking would have come to a standstill.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my family, friends, and church family who have lovingly put forth prayers, resources, and love throughout this grueling process. Their constant encouragement fueled my persistence and uplifted my spirit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER	
I. EDWARD BUNTING AND HIS ROLE IN THE BELFAST FESTIVAL OF 1792	1
II. THOMAS MOORE AND THE LEGACY OF <i>MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES</i>	13
III. BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND HIS FOLK SONG SETTINGS OF <i>MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES</i>	34
IV. IMPRESSIONS OF IRISH MUSIC IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES	45
V. MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF BRITTEN'S <i>MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES</i>	55
VI. CONCLUSION.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	77

CHAPTER I

EDWARD BUNTING AND HIS ROLE IN THE BELFAST FESTIVAL OF 1792

Edward Bunting was a classically trained church musician residing in Belfast during the late 18th century. While he was an excellent transcriber and performer of Western musical practice, his legacy would be that of the preserver of the Irish harping tradition. His legendary transcriptions of Irish harping tunes at the Belfast Harpers Festival in 1792 would bring attention to Irish music on an international scale and would lead to the famous arrangements of the tunes by Thomas Moore. Before understanding Bunting's role in Irish history, it is important to make note of the state of Belfast and Ireland in at the time. Though Belfast was economically successful as a merchant city, it was still under the political rule of the Anglican, or Protestant Ascendancy, linked back to Queen Elizabeth's brutal takeover of both church and state in England. Though the Anglican Church was considered Protestant, the Ascendancy surpassed religious boundaries into the realm of political and social control of the entirety of Ireland. Therefore, even other Protestant groups such as the Presbyterians were left out of power, in addition to the already legally limited Catholic population. Though the city was prosperous, tension and resentment of the Ascendancy's oppression were brewing under the surface. In Belfast, the Society of the United Irishmen formed as an organization that sought to unite both Catholic and Presbyterian Irish alike in order to gain civil liberties.¹

¹ S. C. Lanier, "'It Is New-strung and Shant Be Heard': Nationalism and Memory in the Irish Harp Tradition," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 8, no. 1 (1999): 1–26, doi:10.1080/09681229908567279.

These trying times were a precursor to a long line of Irish conflict. It was in the midst of this kindled sentiment for identity that the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge, previously the Belfast Reading Society, recognized the need for a preservation of Irish history and culture. This group would take charge of the organization of the Belfast Harpers' Assembly in 1792. S. C. Lanier explains, "The organizers of the Assembly were to glean their concepts of national identity and of the Irish harper bard from the contemporary literature made available by this Belfast Reading Society."² The Irish bardic tradition had extremely ancient roots, reaching back to the time of the Celts in the BC centuries, if not before. The bards were esteemed members of their communities, learned in history, poetry, and music. They underwent thirteen years of education to commit immense amounts of knowledge to memory and to become trained in the traditions of harp and song. These cultural historians not only served in the royal courts, but were also known to take to the battlefield and ignite inspiration and war-lust in their fighting kinsmen. They were both the definers and the defenders of their clans' cultural identity.

To understand the significance of the role of the bard in the preservation of Irish culture, one must first understand the importance of the musical instrument at the heart of that culture: the Irish harp. In her article about the Irish harp as a utopian image, Mary Louise O'Donnell states,

The Irish harp occupies a unique, yet complex utopian space in this period, and the instrument, and its tradition, formed part of an intricate utopian fabric that resulted in a revolutionary crescendo in the 1790s and ultimately, a rebellion by

² Ibid., 6.

the United Irishmen in 1798 . . . The Irish harp was an “open space of opposition,” in particular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries . . . Throughout the centuries, no other musical instrument, or instrumental tradition, has played such an extensive role in symbolism, allegory, and the creation of national identities as the Irish harp.³

While this strong statement by O'Donnell might meet some opposition, it still highlights the importance of the Irish harp, to its people and identity. From regional flags to the side of a glass of Guinness beer, the harp is an image that has resonated with the Irish people for centuries. Before it became such a defining image, however, it existed as a musical instrumental tradition. The history of the Irish peoples before the time of written language is somewhat murky, but some scholars claim that the original Irish race had genetic and cultural links to even older regions, such as Egypt and parts of India. In an attempt to define “The Characteristic Traits of Irish Music” in 1897, Annie Patterson wrote, “for the music of Ireland is essentially harp music.”⁴ She claims the roots of the Irish harp stem from the “three-stringed Egyptian lyre,” which could have originated from the Hebrew lyre, most famously used by King David. McDonnell elaborates on this imagery further, claiming that the lyre was always a significant religious symbol, especially to those who could not read language.

The image of David playing a harp-like instrument or lyre was a popular visual motif in Ireland and Europe on carvings of stone crosses from the seventh century onward and in manuscript art from the eighth century. The representation of David and the harp (or lyre) was a powerful visual metaphor . . . The point at which the harp came to be viewed visually in a wider, nonreligious context is

³ Mary Louise O'Donnell, “A Driving Image of Revolution: The Irish Harp and Its Utopian Space in the Eighteenth Century,” *Utopian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 252-73, doi:10.1353/utp.2010.0013.

⁴ Annie W. Patterson, “The Characteristic Traits of Irish Music,” *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 23, no. 1 (1896): 92, doi:10.1093/jrma/23.1.91.

unclear, but it is probable that the visual coding of the harp to represent Ireland originated in a non-Irish context.⁵

Though ancient Ireland held no known written language until the arrival of Christianity via Saint Patrick in approximately the fifth century, records, history, and songs were preserved through the oral tradition of the bards. They became an elite class within Irish society, holders of epic poetry, songs, and customs. Patterson, in her article, “The Folk-Music of Ireland,” explains the lofty rank of bard:

Great indeed was the honour paid to their minstrels by the ancient Irish, bards ranking next in rank to chiefs and kings . . . Foreign invasion, shortly following, interfered with the power of this strong musical caste. But the traces of a native minstrelsy of an exalted character, which these autocrats of the harp bequeathed to posterity, are still preserved in the vitalizing and emotional appeal of the *oldest* specimens of our native music. It may be remarked here, in passing, that the quasi-collegiate education of the bards covered a close period of musical and liberal art-studies of about twelve years. As compared with the pipers, who were mainly music-makers for the masses, the harpers were on a more elevated, aristocratic footing.⁶

In Bunting’s research section of his third volume of *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, he includes “An Historical and Critical Dissertation on the Bard,” where he quotes Dr. Brown’s dissertation:

Invested with honours, wealth, and power, they possessed an art which gave them a commanding influence. Every chief bard, called *Allah Radaw*, or Doctor in Poetry, retained thirty of inferior note; and one of the second order fifteen . . . It was one of their privileges to be billeted on the country from All-hallowtide to

⁵ O’Donnell, 256-7.

⁶ Patterson, 457.

May, and to be exempted from taxes and plunder and to wear a robe of the same colour of that used by the kings.⁷

It is easy to see how the combination of intelligence and skill, partnered with the religious symbolism of the lyre, and the social clout held by these bards could potentially create a demi-god image in the eyes of the Irish people. Unfortunately, it would be their prowess and influence over their communities that would later be the catalyst for their being targeted. Note the impressive tale quoted from Roman writer Diodorus Siculus, from 45 A.D., again included in Bunting's dissertation:

. . . the bards stept in between hostile armies, standing with their swords drawn and their spears extended ready to engage, and by their eloquence, as by irresistible enchantment, prevented the effusion of blood, and prevailed upon them to sheath their swords.

Bunting infers "that their influence over the minds of the people was great beyond example."⁸ This account reveals two main points: 1) The bards had sway and influence over their tribes; 2) These "warrior bards," although in this case promoting peace, were not afraid to race into battle or risk their own lives to defend their clan. While to some these traits would appear admirable, to future adversaries they would appear threatening.

Many other nations would try to occupy and eventually conquer Ireland, bringing new waves of influence with them each time. Even though many other "civilized" nations looked upon the ancient Irish as barbaric because of their tribal warfare and lack

⁷ Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland: An Edition Comprising the Three Collections by Edward Bunting Originally Publ. in 1796, 1809 and 1840* (Dublin: Waltons Piano and Musical Instrument Galleries, 1969), 2.

⁸ Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1.

of written language, nearly every visitor was impressed with their virtuosity in melody and harp-playing. Many of the Romans, both during occupation and well after, were smitten with the music of Ireland and Wales, which share a similar history. One Roman writer named Cambrensis claimed that Scotland and Wales should “strive with rival skill to emulate *Ireland* in music.”⁹ Under the Romans, bardic tradition thrived, was encouraged, and even funded. The Irish family clans successfully ruled and ran the nation under different occupational periods, bouncing between Norman and English rule for centuries. The bardic way of life was not truly threatened until the reign of the brutal and notorious Tudor dynasty on the English throne, leading to the Ascendancy power in Ireland.

In her section, “Colonizing the Irish Harp,” O’Donnell writes, “In Ireland from the eighth century, the primary representation of the harp or harp-like instruments, was in a religious context, generally depicted in the hands of the figure of David.”¹⁰ She then explains that it was after the imagery of the harp became feminine, with the upper torso of a winged woman on the front woodwork of the frame, that the connection between the nation and the instrument began to meld together into one identity. English literary figures began to use the harp emblem as a symbol for Ireland herself, or *Erin* to her own people. Though the harp had once stood as a symbol of peace, as in the David imagery, once it was linked to the Irish, in the eyes of the British, it then became associated with wildness and the inability to be tamed. O’Donnell says,

⁹ Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, 4.

¹⁰ O’Donnell, 256.

In 1612, the English Renaissance poet and playwright Sir John Davies wrote an account entitled *Historical relations, or, A discovery of the true causes why Ireland was never entirely subdu'd nor brought under obedience of the Crown of England until the beginning of the reign of King James of happy memory*. Davies, who was instrumental in framing plans for the Plantation of Ulster, credited James I and his officials with establishing peace in Ireland. He noted: "Briefly, the clock of the civil Government, is now well set, and all the wheels thereof do move in Order; The strings of this Irish Harp, which the civil Magistrate doth finger, are all in tune (for I omit to speak of the State Ecclesiastical) and make a good Harmony in this Common-weal. So as we may well conceive a hope, that Ireland . . . will from henceforth proove a Land of Peace and Concorde." The image of "fingering" the Irish harp, that is, controlling the Irish people, was common throughout the seventeenth century.¹¹

It was under the spreading control of the Ascendancy that Turlough Carolan, the last known Irish harper of his time to compose new works, was born. Living from around 1670 to 1738, after the era of Oliver Cromwell and his mass executions of Irish harpers which followed Queen Elizabeth's own edict, Carolan nevertheless lived in an Ascendancy-controlled occupation. When he was a child, his family moved from the Anglicized east Ireland to the West, where he was able to grow up bilingual. After a smallpox contraction left him blind in adolescence, he was granted education and an apprenticeship with an established harper by a generous benefactress. Patronage would be his way of life, as most of his two hundred attributed tunes bear the names of his various donors, many of them wealthy Catholic families. What becomes notable about Carolan is his evolution of compositional style as he became more exposed to the trends of mainland Europe. After hearing visiting Italian composers, such as Vivaldi, Corelli, and Geminiani, Carolan's tunes began taking on structural changes resembling Italian

¹¹ O'Donnell, 256.

influence, even bearing a likeness to *da capo* form. As his career advanced, his pieces became more of a hybrid between Irish and European musical elements. There is even a chance that he may have contributed the first reel to the repertory, which would imply that he originated an Irish musical form that is still in practice today.¹²

Though Carolan was musically influenced by particular European practices, it was still evident that he was the closest thing to a bard that his era could claim. “He was a one-man-band relic of what in high medieval Irish practice had been a trio—the poet who made eulogistic and satirical verse, the declaimer who intoned or sang it and the harper who accompanied and/or interspersed it.”¹³ Carolan’s historical acclaim has likely been inflated by the following generations, including Bunting’s, but there is no doubt that he was a culturally significant figure for Irish music. He was the crux of change for the bardic harping tradition in Ireland, and his European assimilations might have very well guaranteed the survival of certain unique Irish music practices and melodies. He unknowingly set a precedent for deviation from the bardic oral tradition, which would pave the way for Bunting’s transcriptions and Moore’s adaptations.

Edward Bunting was born in 1773, a full generation after Carolan’s death. He received musical training as a child from a local church organist of his home town of Armagh, studying standard Western art traditions. When he was eleven years old, he began an apprenticeship with William Ware, the church organist of St. Anne’s Church of Ireland Congregation in Belfast. It was through this opportunity that he remained in

¹² Joan Rimmer, “Patronage, Style and Structure in the Music Attributed to Turlough Carolan,” *Early Music* 15, no. 2, Plucked String Issue (May 1987): 164–74.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 173.

Belfast under the care of a Presbyterian merchant family called the McCrackens, who would become very active in the United Irishman movement. The family supported him in his musical endeavors, and later in the pursuit of his Irish melody collections.¹⁴ Though he was a skilled musician, it was Bunting's connection to Henry Joy McCracken, the head of the household in which he resided, that brought about the opportunity for which he would become known. After a public meeting held by a number of harp enthusiasts in Belfast, it became apparent that citizens wished to preserve the music and poetry of Ireland in written form, though it had been solely an oral tradition before then. Two of the leaders who emerged for this project were Henry Joy McCracken and Dr. James McDonnell, both founding members of the Belfast Reading Society. Through their leadership, the plan became to hold an Assembly of Harpers, where prizes would be awarded to those who could expertly perform traditional, especially previously unheard, airs on the Irish harp. This festival of sorts was to run from July 10-14 of 1792:

A respectable Body of the Inhabitants of Belfast having published a plan for reviving the ancient Music of this country, and the project having met with such support and approbation as must insure success to the undertaking, PERFORMERS ON THE IRISH HARP are requested to assemble in this town on the tenth day of July next, when a considerable sum will be distributed as premiums, in proportion to their respective merits.

It being the intention of the Committee that every Performer shall receive some Premium, it is hoped no Harper will decline on account of his having been unsuccessful on any former occasion.

Robert Bradshaw
Secretary and Treasurer¹⁵

¹⁴ Brian Boydell, "Bunting, Edward," Grove Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000004324>.

¹⁵ "National Music of Ireland," *Belfast New-Letter*, 27 April 1792.

The committee agreed that there would be multiple musical transcribers present, including Bunting and his mentor William Ware, in addition to an Irish speaker, to assure the authenticity of the transcriptions. In the end, only Bunting attended, and was left with the daunting task of recording the tunes which were in an unfamiliar style to him, full of stylistic flourishes and melismas.

Whether it was due to the short amount of time between the ad being posted and the actual festival, or to the general decline of the Irish harp tradition, only ten Irish harpers and one Welsh harper arrived for the event.¹⁶ As James W. Flannery writes,

Only ten harpers answered the call to appear at the Festival. Of these, all but one were well into middle age, and six were blind. The eldest, Denis Hempson, was ninety-seven years of age—the single harper who still plucked the metal strings with long crooked fingernails. This traditional method had disappeared because, like everyone in the Gaelic-speaking countryside, the harpers had become tillers of the soil.¹⁷

There were other factors that challenged Bunting's giant undertaking. Firstly, while the old age of most of the harpers might possibly seem to add legitimacy to the project's authenticity, it could also bring issues of the deterioration of virtuosity that aging and lack of constant practice can bring. To Bunting's Western ears, there may have been no differentiation between a grace note and an accidental slip. The second problem that could cause the questioning of the musical authenticity is the small number of performers. Due to the festival's ad posting so close to the performance date, the

¹⁶ Lanier, 8.

¹⁷ James W. Flannery, *Dear Harp of My Country: The Irish Melodies of Thomas Moore* (Nashville: Hal Leonard, 2014), 56.

distance that harpers could travel to participate was limited. Therefore, those in attendance were all from the region closest to Belfast. The third and possibly most burdensome challenge that Bunting faced regarding his transcriptions was that he bore the sole responsibility for recording the tunes. As skilled and practiced as he was, he couldn't possibly achieve the precision that it would take to document the melodies, which were not only unknown to him, but also in a folk style with which he was unfamiliar. While Bunting's endeavor was well-intended, even noble, its hastiness and disorganization may not have allowed for complete accuracy. Again, Flannery describes the scene:

The manuscripts of Bunting, now preserved in the library of Queen's University, Belfast, demonstrate the daunting challenge with which he was faced. The harpers, like jazz musicians, came out of an oral tradition in which improvisation was an essential skill. Imagine the task of instantly transcribing such music, elaborate embellishments and all. Denis Hempson was particularly difficult because of his reluctance to repeat the same pieces in exactly the same way. As Janet Harbison has noted, it is no wonder that Bunting's scrawled notations look like the scratching of a chicken in sand.

Despite these difficulties, Bunting was inspired by the occasion of the Belfast Harp Festival to make the collection of traditional Irish music his life's work. The first of three collections under his name appeared in 1796. It contained sixty-six harp tunes transcribed for the piano plus a commentary which Bunting claimed, contrary to his actual experience, that "harpers always played the same tune in the same key, with the same kind of expression, and without a single variation in any single passage, or even in any note."¹⁸

It is important to note Bunting's insistence on the validity of these melodies, because he would later convey disapproval towards Thomas Moore's liberal

¹⁸ Flannery, 57.

modifications to his transcriptions. It seems that both men would have the opinion that their own publications were the paths to the melodies' preservation. Bunting became known as somewhat of an archivist, while Moore would be known as a Romantic expresser of patriotism through his settings of the melodies. Once again, the point must be made that Bunting was attempting to document melodies that had been passed down through generations via an oral tradition. The very act of transcription already disregarded the important oral aspect of the melodies, immediately transforming them from living, breathing music to black ink on a page, destined to be purchased, consumed, and reinterpreted by Western audiences. Like Carolan before him, Bunting was, however unintentionally, adapting and modernizing the melodies in an attempt to contain and preserve their cultural significance. He was motivated by the love for his homeland and his respect for the bardic tradition, always maintaining its importance in the identity of Ireland.

Whatever differences of opinion may exist as to the high degree of early civilization and national glory laid claim to by the Irish people, it has never been questioned that, in the most remote times, they had at least a national music peculiar to themselves, and that their bards and harpers were eminently skilful in its performance.¹⁹

¹⁹ Edward Bunting, *Preface to The Ancient Music of Ireland, Arranged for the Pianoforte* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1840).

CHAPTER II

THOMAS MOORE AND THE LEGACY OF *MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES*

Thomas Moore (1779-1852) was an Irish poet and writer whose chronology only followed Bunting's by approximately a decade. Born to a Catholic family within Ascendancy-controlled Dublin, Moore was at a societal disadvantage from birth. Fortunately, his father was a successful and somewhat wealthy grocer and his mother fostered her son's artistic talents and sense of ambition. It was this combination of both financial and emotional support which allowed Moore to receive a classical education, shaping his skills in language, literature, and history. His command of writing, in addition to the auspicious "removal of Catholic disabilities" in 1794, meant that Moore became one of the first Catholics in Ireland to attend Dublin's Protestant Trinity College. His attendance was a significant opportunity, as the college had been founded by Queen Elizabeth I herself centuries earlier. Since its founding, Trinity had been under the Ascendancy's harsh control, and Catholics were forbidden via Queen Elizabeth's personal edict.²⁰ In fact, even in 1869, authors of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* still were highlighting the inequities of Trinity College and hierarchy of its teachers as Ascendancy members:

. . . we cannot doubt but that the education she provided has developed genius, and that her (Protestant) sons have extended the bounds of science and adorned the fields of literature. But where is her list of her Catholic alumni of distinction;

²⁰ Poetry Foundation, "Thomas Moore," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-moore> (accessed January 1, 2019).

and, above all, of Catholics who remained faithful to the principles of their holy religion?²¹

It was Moore's time at this divisive university that planted the seed of politics within him. Until then, Moore's classical education had not included the history or language of his own native Ireland. He was not even familiar with the Irish language, though he excelled at all things English. Most likely this path of training had been urged by his parents, wishing to see him succeed in London. If he did not measure up to his English competitors in skill and ambition, he could easily be dismissed as an unintelligent Irish stereotype. At the university, however, he was surrounded by fellow countrymen who introduced him to Irish heritage and the current political situation. It was during this period when Moore's patriotic fire began to burn, and when he first encountered a group called the United Irishmen Society (UIS). This political group, originally intending to enforce Parliamentary change, would eventually participate in a bloody, unsuccessful rebellion in 1798 against England. Moore made two close friends at the university who were active in the revolutionary group: Robert Emmett and Edward Hudson.

It was through Edward Hudson that Moore was first introduced to Bunting's *Collection of Ancient Irish Music*. With Moore on piano and Hudson on the flute, the two would read through the collection and play the tunes together. Moore was struck by the loveliness of the melodies and recalled later that Bunting's collection introduced him to "the beauties of our native music."²² These tunes played a strong role in bolstering

²¹ "Trinity College, Dublin—Part 1," Irish Ecclesiastical Record, 1869, 1–8.

²² Flannery, 59.

Moore's nationalistic sense of pride for his homeland. As this pride grew, so did his impulsive teenage fervor. In late 1797, Moore wrote an anonymous letter that was published in the *Dublin Press*, which was a journal created by a group of UIS members. It was titled "Letter to the Students of Trinity College, Dublin," in which Moore wrote with angry revolutionary tones against the professors on campus who had outlawed the UIS. Moore soon received a somber scolding from his family and his friend Robert Emmet, who had both recognized his writing. Upon recognizing Moore's penmanship, Emmet warned that his friend's hotheadedness could have revealed the location of some of the UIS rebels on campus, which could have endangered their lives. Moore vowed never to behave so brashly again for the cause he loved. His restraint proved to be self-preserving as his friends began to gain unwanted attention from the enemy. His music-loving friend, Edward Hudson, was arrested for his involvement with the Irish patriots early in the 1798, right before the very violent and bloody rebellion of that same year. Moore visited Hudson in the Kilmainham jail and was shocked to see the horrible conditions that his countrymen were forced to endure. This experience haunted Moore for the rest of his life and bolstered his patriotism. He suffered another tragedy in 1803 when his good friend Robert Emmet was finally captured and tried for his involvement in the UIS. He was found guilty of high treason and hanged publicly, then beheaded, but not before declaring his patriotic final words: "Let no man write my epitaph. When my country shall have taken her place among the nations of the world, then and only then let my epitaph be written." Moore would go on to allude to Emmet in many future poems,

the most famous being “O! Breathe Not His Name,” which memorialized his dear friend’s last request.

O, breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,
Where cold and unhonor’d his relics are laid:
Sad, silent, and dark, be the tears that we shed,
As the night dew that falls on the grass o’er his head.

But the night dew that falls, though in silence it weeps,
Shall brighten with verdure the grave where he sleeps;
And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,
Shall long keep his memory green in our souls.²³

It is important to note the fine line Thomas Moore would have been walking as he continued his career. In order for him to succeed as an Irish-Catholic writer, it would be necessary for him to gain standing in the London professional arena. His innate talent and his education from Trinity College enabled him to compete on a high level, but it was through his social skills and personal charm that he eventually wove his path up the ladder of English society. When he arrived in London, he took the well-traveled path for writers of attending law school. His studies were quickly cast aside when he undertook the project of finishing one of his university endeavors: translating the Greek poet Anacreon’s poetry of loves and delights into modern English text and meter. The combination of the quality of his work and his public singing of some of the poetry earned him the attention and patronage of important people in the aristocracy, including the Prince of Wales. One wealthy noble, Lord Moira, would champion the cause of Moore’s patronage, supporting many of his publishing endeavors and even connecting

²³ Flannery, 62–70; Poetry Foundation.

him with a registrar's position in the court of Bermuda. He quickly tired of the lack of thrills of the job and decided to tour America, where he met important leaders like Thomas Jefferson. Ultimately, he was disgusted with the hypocrisy he found in America, of a nation built upon the backs of slaves, yet touting itself upon the ideal of equality. In his own words,

Who can, with patience, for a moment see
The medley mass of pride and misery,
Of whips and charters, manacles and rights,
Of slaving blacks and democratic whites
And, all the piebald polity that reigns
In free confusion o'er Columba's plains?²⁴

These feelings of disgust led him to write *Epistles, Odes, and Other Poems* in 1806, which contained writings and commentary about his unpleasant view of America. This publication understandably received much condemnation from American critics, but also from the noted Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*. As his form of retaliation and defense of his honor, Moore challenged Jeffrey to a duel, which was fortunately interrupted by the police. Upon inspecting both men's pistols, it was discovered that neither participant had bullets in his weapon. This strange form of a peace offering smoothed over the bad blood between them and they went on to become close friends.²⁵

There is much to be gleaned about Moore's character from this wild tale, though it may appear as a plot dramatic enough to grace the operatic stage. While he was quietly attempting to find the right method to influence London politics regarding the Catholic

²⁴ Flannery, 76.

²⁵ Flannery, 74–75; Poetry Foundation; John Warrack, "Moore, Thomas." *Oxford Music Online*, 20 Jan. 2001, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19067.

Emancipation in Ireland, he had no qualms about expressing the outrage of similar injustice in America. There seems to be a recurring pattern within Moore's personality that reveals him to be strongly morally opposed to bondage and the act of hypocrisy on the part of the oppressors. The act of publishing these controversial epistles seems to have spurred Moore away from the idealistic translating of light-hearted poetry and into the arena of sharp political satire. He would go on to combat politicians, bigots, and church leaders alike with his witty satirical writings, such as *Corruption and Intolerance, Two Poems* in 1808 and *The Sceptic: A Philosophical Satire* in 1809.²⁶ It was during this period that Moore was approached by Dublin publishers William and James Power, who wished to publish a book of Irish melodies with English poetry. The brothers had witnessed the success of a similar idea in Scotland, with a volume of Scottish melodies that had been adapted by the famous Robert Burns. Once approached, Moore began to scour through Bunting's original transcriptions of the harping melodies, selecting those whose musical characteristics pleased him on an emotional level. It is interesting to note that Moore judged the melodies by their musical quality and impact, as opposed to selecting only those which would lend themselves easily to the existing writing forms of the day. He wrote of his selection process:

I only know that in a strong and inborn feeling for music lies the source of whatever talent I may have shown for poetical composition; and that it was the effort to translate into language my emotion and passion which music appeared to me to express that first led to my writing any poetry at all deserving of the name. Dryden has happily described music as 'inarticulate poetry'; and I have always felt, in adapting words to an expressive air, that I was but bestowing upon it the

²⁶ Poetry Foundation.

gift of articulation, and thus enabling it to speak to others all that was conveyed, in its wordless eloquence, to me.²⁷

What becomes unclear is exactly which of Bunting's tunes Moore chose for his new lyrical settings. Veronica ní Chinnéide, in her 1959 "Search for the Sources of Moore's Melodies," states plainly,

In his interesting study of Moore, Mr. H.M. Jones [Moore's biographer] states that 'there is a vast literature on the relation of the *Irish Melodies* to their originals.' This, however, is hardly the case . . . My task has been to attempt to trace to its source every air used by Moore. In some cases I have not succeeded; in a few others the best that can be done is to suggest two or three alternatives.²⁸

She continues in her article to identify contributors of some of the selected melodies that resided outside of Bunting's *Collection of Ancient Irish Music*, who would mail Moore transcriptions of traditional tunes. Some of these providers included George Petrie, an artist, musician, and antiquary from Dublin; an unknown Dr. Kelly; one of his publishers, William Power; and a well-respected antiquary from Cork named Thomas Crofton Croker. Though difficult to trace the lineage of each individual melody, one overarching purpose emerges from Moore for his motivation in writing the melodies.

In the Advertisement to the First Number of the Melodies, Power quotes extensively from a letter written by Moore explaining the spirit in which he approached his great undertaking. In this letter the poet expresses his admiration for the melodies of Ireland and adds: "If Burns had been an Irishman . . . his heart would have been proud of such music, and his genius would have made it immortal.' The format and general style of the *Melodies* is a close imitation of Thomson's *Scottish Airs*, issued serially in Edinburgh with Burns as the principal

²⁷ Flannery, 85.

²⁸ Veronica Ni Chinnéide (Veronica Kennedy). "The Sources of Moore's Melodies." *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 89, no. 2 (1959): 109–134.

contributor of the words. It would thus seem that Moore was fired with an ambition to do for Ireland what Burns had done for Scotland.²⁹

Though the tunes would evolve away from exact replication in Moore's settings, he took pains to ensure that each melody was uniquely Irish. The result was a collection of 124 melodies, each derived from an Irish folk melody. The collection would be translated into German, Czech, Italian, Hungarian, and French, and Hector Berlioz's translation "guaranteed a large European audience for these songs."³⁰ A German translation of *The Last Rose of Summer* even made it into Friedrich von Flotow's opera *Martha* in the form of a traditional Lutheran chorale.³¹ The popularity of Moore's melodies in Europe was perhaps one of the very sticking points that his critics used as ammunition against him in regard to his settings. Some were not impressed or pleased at Moore's giant undertaking. There became two separate deluges of criticism against the poet: 1) from Bunting himself and others who like-mindedly believed that the English text was damaging to the authenticity and even sacredness of the original Irish melodies, and 2) various prominent writers of the English language who berated Moore's seemingly romanticized language and portrayal of Ireland. Gerry Smyth, in his book *Music in Irish Cultural History*, writes about the perspective of Moore's critics:

Moore (aided by his collaborator, the composer Sir John Stevenson) reset some of the melodies from Bunting's collection (as well as from many other sources), gave them keys, added grace and passing notes, and lyrics which he believed to be in sympathy with the spirit of the 'original' melodies. He was criticised at the time, however, for betraying the spirit of the music he did so, apparently, by

²⁹ Ibid., 114.

³⁰ Poetry Foundation.

³¹ Louis Charles Elson. "Flotow's 'Martha'." *Modern Music and Musicians: Encyclopedia, A History of Music*; Special, V.1 (1912): 455.

‘translating’ supposedly pristine Irish melodies into the romantic idiom of the drawing room—worse still, the *English* drawing room, wherein a modicum of wild Irish romance went a long way. Such indeed formed the basis for much of the subsequent suspicion of this aspect of Moore’s career. The controversy thus ignited remains with us still: as Harry White comments, ‘the *Melodies* inaugurated a bitter quarrel between tradition and innovation which would long thrive in Irish music discourse.’³²

Ironically, one of Moore’s critics was Edward Bunting himself, who disapproved of Moore’s use of the English language, his “translations,” and the use of modern harmony alongside the Irish melodies. He claimed that Moore’s subtraction of the ornamentation and his altering of the melodies to appeal to his new lyrics distorted the original purity of the melodies into something indistinguishable. He stated in his preface to his *Ancient Music of Ireland* that was published in 1840:

. . . the fact, that in these new Irish melodies the work of the poet was accounted of so paramount an interest, that the proper order of song-writing was in many instances inverted, and, instead of the words, a solecism which could never have happened had the reputation of the writer not been so great as at one to carry the tunes he deigned to make use of altogether out of their old sphere among the simple, and tradition-loving people of the country—with whom, in truth, many of the new melodies, to this day, are hardly suspected to be themselves.³³

Despite Bunting’s stance on purity, his own work was eventually called into question over similar issues by people who believed he had inserted his own diatonic interpretation into the scribbling he had made at the Harp Festival in Belfast and eventually his published works of the melodies. He, in his own way, had unknowingly put himself on the taboo side of the debate of tradition versus innovation by writing the

³² Gerry Smyth, *Music in Irish Cultural History* (Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009).

³³ Smyth, 19.

melodies in the Western European tonal language with which he was familiar. Smyth writes about Bunting's dilemma:

Bunting's melodies were already 'betrayals,' then, already removed from a mythical originary trace by the time Moore encountered them. Every act of salvation on his part was also an act of betrayal to some degree. Bunting's entire career may in fact be traced in terms of a tension, a growing realisation on the one hand and a constant disavowal on the other, of the fact that harmony always existed in potential in relation to Irish melody, even in the modal forms in which he first encountered the melodies at the Belfast Harp Festival in 1792.³⁴

Harry White, in his book, *The Keeper's Recital*, describes the almost dogmatically different approaches of Bunting and Moore in treating the melodies. He uses the word *antiquarianism*, or the recovery of the past, to describe Bunting's role and attitude in the preservation of the melodies, while Moore is designated the word *romanticism*, or the ideology of the present.³⁵ In other words, Bunting wished to preserve the melodies in a frozen point in time, while Moore sought to adapt them to the current cultural trends of the day. White also identifies a key ideological difference between the two men. While Moore used his poetry in partnership with the melodies in order to coax political change, Bunting believed firmly that the melodies should not be altered or used for any kind of political statement. In the 1840 volume of his *Ancient Music of Ireland*, Bunting not too casually references Moore:

The world has been too apt to suppose our music of a highly plaintive and melancholy character, and that it partook of our National feeling at the state of our country *in a political view*, and that three parts out of four of our tunes were of

³⁴ Smyth, 22.

³⁵ Harry White. *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770-1970* (Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 1998), 44.

this complaining nature. Now there never was anything more erroneous than this idea.³⁶

White continues with a notable point: “That Bunting should regard Moore’s romanticism as a ‘political view,’ however, clearly attests his own awareness of the proximity between music and politics in Ireland.”³⁷ Bunting felt that Moore’s portrayal of Ireland was too somber, and did not fairly represent her entirety. Moore, however, observing the current state of the fair isle, felt that Ireland’s true artistic and cultural identity lay in its seemingly constant oppression throughout its history. He stated his case:

The language of sorrow, however, is in general best suited to our Music, and with themes of this nature the poet may be amply supplied. There is scarcely a page of our annals that will not furnish him a subject, and while the national Muse of other countries adorns her temple proudly with trophies of the past, in Ireland her melancholy altar, like the shrine of Pity at Athens, is to be known only by the tears that are shed upon it . . .³⁸

Moore’s melancholic take on Ireland’s identity resonated with the company he kept in London, who were mostly aristocratic supporters of the Whig party, who happened to support the cause of Catholic Emancipation in Ireland. The most famous relationship in his circle was with Lord Byron, who, after a long friendship with Moore, eventually entrusted his memoirs to him. The Irish poet’s winning combination of eloquent word mastery, powerful allusions to Irish history and myth, and moving personal performances

³⁶ Ibid., 43.

³⁷ White, 43.

³⁸ Ibid., 45.

of his pieces touched the hearts of his English listeners, and potentially swayed the political climate in London. Emer Nolan states in his article about Moore and politics:

Many of the airs adapted by Moore had first been written down by Edward Bunting at the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792, from the playing of ten elderly harpists. These musicians had represented for their audience a frail surviving link with the culture of the ancient Irish bards. But for Bunting, as for his United Irish associates who organized the festival, this tradition could still be rescued and revived. And so controversy over the *Melodies* began with Bunting's own objections to the "drawling, doleful and die-away manner" in which Moore performed some of the airs that Bunting had collected in his *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music* (1796): 'The world have [sic] been too apt to suppose our music of a highly plaintive and melancholy character, and that it partook of our National feeling at the state of our country in a political view, and that three parts out of four of our tunes were of this complaining nature. Now there never was anything more erroneous that this idea.'

[Nolan] Moore has been accused not just of betraying the generally animated and joyful spirit of traditional Irish culture but also the political optimism of the United Irish movement that had helped to save this music from oblivion. For the airs had not just been modified by Moore's predominantly nostalgic and melancholic verses; they had been, so the accusation went, transmogrified.³⁹

Once again it is important to note the precarious social and professional dilemma Moore was experiencing. In his article about Thomas Moore's musical legacy, Richard Pine writes,

Moore referred to Bunting's three volumes of collections as "our National Music" and in turn his texts earned him the epithet "our national poet." But, as Joseph Ryan has observed, "Moore personifies the dilemma of the cultural duality of his age" in that he fell between the hurdles of antiquarian purism and classical composition. Adherents of the former found his arrangements a betrayal of the original source material, while the latter condemned his subordination of music to an extra-musical purpose. Ernest Boyd called Moore "our literary ambassador in

³⁹ Emer Nolan, "Thomas Moore: Irish Melodies and Discordant Politics," *Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism* 283 (2014). <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1420116768/LitRC?u=ncliveec&sid=LitRC&xid=19845e67>.

England.” Yet he might have reflected on Sir Henry Wotton’s pun, that an ambassador is “sent to lie abroad for his country”—the irony being that although, in Ryan’s words, Moore “did more to propagate the nationalist cause [in London] than could any rebellion”—and did so at a time of increasing political mobilisation of Irish opinion—he was, by becoming the darling of the London drawing-rooms, belittling the cultural heritage of a race anxious to assert its difference from, and independence of, the genres of English culture.⁴⁰

In other words, those in Bunting’s antiquarian camp might have been branding Moore as what modern speakers would deem a “sell-out.” He was utilizing an art form that was uniquely beautiful and molding it to the cultural norms of the day. What didn’t help Moore’s case when it came to his printed publication was the choice of the musician who would arrange the piano accompaniments to the airs. Again, Harry White:

Sir John Stevenson’s part in this process had been a source of controversy from the beginning . . . As a competent but not especially original musician, Stevenson added brief preludes and postludes (‘symphonies’) to his piano harmonisations of the airs. An anonymous critic (George Petrie) in *The Dublin Examiner* in 1816 remarked that these additions possessed ‘nothing kindred with the airs which they introduce’ and bluntly suggested that ‘they are too much in the common style of the second-rate composers of the day, whose works obtain a popularity by being adapted to the taste, as well as the fingers of the young ladies to whom more finished productions would be unintelligible.’

Much else in this vein (and worse) attended criticism of Stevenson’s work throughout the nineteenth century. As Moore’s position as national bard was consolidated, Stevenson’s accompaniments came to seem more repulsive than the ‘authentic dross’ which they sought to dispel . . . There remains the insuperable deficiency of style which results from the abrupt discontinuity between the preludes, vocal settings and postludes. Melodic structure and verbal feeling powerfully coincide in the verses. The symphonies seem all the more disjointed as a consequence.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Richard Pine, “A Guest of Cultural Politics: The Twentieth-Century Musical Legacy of Thomas Moore,” *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJTEAS)*, Irish Issue 8, no. no. 1 (Spring 2002).

⁴¹ White, 48.

These simplified and uninspired piano accompaniments offended both traditional and contemporary listeners alike. To indigenous Irish folk musicians, they sounded artificially diatonic, and to modern classical listeners they seemed grotesquely elementary, resembling a basic version of an Alberti bass. This simplified piano accompaniment could not have helped Moore's cause when it came to being regarded as a poet of prowess. Other than with the close friends in the regency Moore had made, he found the difficulty of proving himself to the literati of the day. Being an Irish writer in an English landscape, and with the satirical nature he preferred, he was constantly under professional scrutiny. Not all his fellow writers fell into the enchantment of his romantic Irish airs, nor the cause they represented. For example, from the brutal review of Arthur Symons, an English critic who refuted a positive review of Moore's *Melodies* as late as the early 1900s,

It is to the Cavalier Lyrics, no doubt, that Moore at his best comes nearest; never within recognisable distance of any Elizabethan work, and never near enough to good work of the Restoration for the comparison to be seriously made. He has their fluency, but none of their gentlemanly restraint; touches of their crudity, but none of their straightforwardness; and of their fine taste, nothing, and nothing of the quality of mind which lurks under all their disguises. In Moore's songs there is no "fundamental brain-work"; they have no base in serious idea or in fine emotion.⁴²

Even his Irish successor, William Butler Yeats, disapproved of Moore's poetic style and supposed attempt to define Ireland's national identity. Much of Yeats's aversion to Moore was the image of "Moore's bourgeois ambitions, his perceived political

⁴² Arthur Symons, "The Poetry of Thomas Moore," *The Fortnightly Review*, April 1, 1905, 681-86.

associations, and his threat to an image of 19th-century Ireland as an imaginative hinterland.”⁴³ Though Yeats appeared much further along the timeline than Moore, his opinion was already being expressed by Moore’s contemporaries during his lifetime. An Englishman named William Hazlitt was critical of Moore’s tendency to make friends in high places, and he condemned him for turning “the wild harp of Erin into a musical snuff-box.”⁴⁴

Moore’s perceived sentimentality in his verses became the main theme through the various criticisms, yet also served as the attraction for his supporters. His followers were drawn to the persona of Moore, in his various talents and his fiery spirit which seemed to permeate everything he did. In an old memoir written about him, the author presents this duality:

Nor has he neglected those more solid attainments which should ever distinguish the well-bred gentleman, for he is an excellent general scholar, and particularly well-read in the literature of the middle ages. His conversational powers are great, and his modest and unassuming manners have placed him in the highest rank of cultivated society . . . Whatever fame he might have acquired he attributed principally to the verses which he had adapted to the delicious strains of Irish melody. His verses, in themselves, could boast of but little merit; but like flies preserved in amber, they were esteemed in consequence of the precious material by which they were surrounded.⁴⁵

The “precious material,” it would seem, were the Irish melodies themselves, which all listeners seemed to agree held innate beauty and emotional depth. It is unfair to state that

⁴³ Simon Kress, “Hurt Into Poetry: The Politics of Sentiment in Northern Irish Poetry, 1966-1998,” PhD diss., Guilford College, 2002, 128.

⁴⁴ Leith Davis, “Irish Bards and English Consumers: Thomas Moore’s Irish Melodies and the Colonized Nation,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 24, no. 2 (April 1993): 7–25.

⁴⁵ “Memoir of Thomas Moore, Esq.,” *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* 12, no. 349 (n.d.).

Moore's verses held "little merit," however, when one examines the calculating way in which they were crafted.

First, it is important to note that though Moore himself did not speak or read Gaelic (Irish), he did not disregard the meter and lilt of the language when approaching his English renditions. The common form of English poetry was the meter used by Shakespeare and other great poets: iambic pentameter, which consisted of five "feet" that followed a long (-) short (˘) pattern, equally ten syllables per line. Moore, his inspiration stemming from the musicality of the melodies themselves, chose to mirror the meter of the existing tunes or lyrics, as opposed to altering the music. Many of the melodies fall into a trisyllabic meter as opposed to a duple, which Moore accentuated through his use of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example, the meter of "At the Mid Hour of Night" originates from an older Irish musical form called *anbránocht*.⁴⁶ One can hear the lilt of triple meter and the softness of the consonant and vowel sounds that Moore uses:

At the mid hour of night, when stars are weeping, I fly
To the lone vale we lov'd, when life shone warm in thine eye;

Compare this rippling tri-meter to a snippet of a standard iambic pentametric poem of the same era by Robert Browning:

That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands . . .⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Flannery, 92.

⁴⁷ Robert Browning, *My Last Duchess*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768/my-last-duchess>

The Browning selection sounds distinctly English, at a familiar, even gallop. The Moore selection has much fewer strong accents and stops, which creates an atmospheric serenity in the language. There were times when Moore did use accents to again allude to Irish meter, when he purposely wrote three strong syllables at the end of a stanza for emphasis of text.⁴⁸ For example, though the famous text of “Tara’s Harp” gambols along in duple feet, the last three syllables of each stanza are strongly accented, creating greater emphasis on the meaning of the text and also alluding to Ireland’s meters.

The harp that once through Tara’s Hall
 The soul of music shed,
 Now hangs as mute on Tara’s wall
 As if that soul were fled.
 So sleeps the pride of former days
 So glory’s thrill is o’er
 And hearts that once beat high for praise
 Now feel that **pulse no more.**

It took a high level of English language mastery and a great deal of respect for the melodies’ origins to balance these structural incorporations. Moore was skillfully both working within existing English metrical structures and creating new ones with his poetry. Also, while Moore was not providing direct translations of the existing Gaelic texts, when applicable, he did consider the first line of each in many instances, in an effort to stay consistent with the original sentiment. For example, ‘The Song of Sorrow’ evolved into ‘Weep on, weep on, your hour is past,’ or ‘Forget not the field where they perished’ became ‘By that lake whose gloomy shore.’⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Flannery, 92.

⁴⁹ Chinnéide, 114.

However, Moore's criticism rarely involved a lack of compositional skill. Most of the complaints addressed his over-romanticizing and over-solemnizing of Ireland and treatment of the country as if it were a sort of Atlantis; mystical, ancient, and extinct. Referring to Ireland's past was not simply a sentimental outpouring for Moore, however. By speaking about seemingly unknown Irish heroes or events through poetry, he could cleverly weave strong national images into his songs which would be recognized by the right audience and not by his potential enemies. He was able to express his own strong emotions to the current situation of his people, while remaining safely non-specific about his targets. A striking example of this literary duality is in the piece "Avenging and Bright." On the surface, it seems to account a tragic historical legend in which a king and sons were betrayed by a supposed ally. Irish listeners would know the tale well. In Moore's personal life, however, he was ending a friendship with the Prince of Wales for the Prince's abandonment of the cause of Catholic Emancipation, for which Moore fought a lifelong battle. The song takes on an entirely current meaning, though to unknowing ears it may have seemed but a fiery telling of a fabled story.

Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin,
 On him, who the brave sons of Usna betray'd;
 For ev'ry fond eye which he waken'd a tear in,
 A drop from his heart-wounds shall weep o'er her blade . . .

Yes, monarch! though sweet are our home recollections,
 Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall;
 Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes, our affections,
 Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all!

These first and last stanzas of the song display the poet's skillful manipulation of patriotic fervor through strong historical imagery and the use of pronouns such as 'our' or 'we.' Instead of Moore merely chronicling a past event in Irish history, he was placing himself among his people, including himself in the 'we.' This method of writing seemingly in the past allowed him to seem non-threatening to his British oppressors, and possibly even avoid treason.

While reviews may have been mixed in his native Ireland and England, there was a place where his *Melodies* eventually helped to define a culture. Across the Atlantic in America, a new culture of Irish Americans was emerging in the nineteenth century. This particular sect of Irish immigrants would eventually be called the "Lace Curtain" Irish. They were middle-class Americans, usually dwelling in the large North and Northeastern cities, and they desperately sought to be unaffiliated with the unfortunate Irish stereotypes that existing Americans had established about them. Oftentimes, people of Irish descent were branded as rowdy, drunken fighters who did not exhibit class or education. The Lace Curtain Irish, in order to assimilate as well-to-do Americans, had usually "unlearned" or stopped practicing their native Irish language. *Moore's Irish Melodies* made its way into the drawing rooms and parlors of these middle-class citizens, where their beautiful melodies and accessible piano accompaniments lent themselves to many an amateur musician. The romantic lyrics about longing for their beautiful homeland resonated with much more strength to these estranged emigrants, as opposed to those who remained in Ireland. It was the stirring poetry, paired with the beautiful

indigenous melodies, that contributed to the *Melodies* becoming a standard in every Irish-American home.⁵⁰

Though his reception throughout the world has been mixed, Moore has undoubtedly taken a significant role in the history of Irish literature and music. His influence upon the elite and the common folk alike helped to usher in political change and a positive view toward Ireland internationally. As his biographer, Howard Mumford Jones, states, “The world has taken Tommy to its bosom for this song [The Harp That Once Through Tara’s Halls], as it has for “‘Tis the Last Rose of Summer” and certain others, because these triumphs are in their own genre absolutely and flawlessly *right*.”⁵¹ Those who loved him adored him, and he never abandoned his passion for the rights of the Irish people. *Moore’s Irish Melodies* was an important step in the preservation and lineage of Irish musical history, and has served as an inspiration for future poets and musicians alike.

The land of poetry and mirth,
Of orators and statesmen, too,
To one more genial, ne’er gave birth,
Than when, gay Moore, it brought forth you....

But thou brought forth thy tuneful lyre,
And swept it with a skillful hand,
And hearts, with joy and hope afire,
Arose to bless thee, thro’ the land.

Thy songs of love, religion, fame,
Resounded from each hill and dale,

⁵⁰ Sean Williams, “The Green Fields of America,” *Irish Traditional Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 103–128.

⁵¹ Howard Mumford Jones, *The Harp That Once--; a Chronicle of the Life of Thomas Moore* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1937), 108.

And fann'd the patriotic flame,
In beautiful Avoca's vale.

They reach'd us here, we have them now,
And treasure them, both rich and poor;

And here's a green wreath for thy brow,
Of Irish shamrocks, Thomas Moore.

In fadeless verdure may it stay,
And long thy gifted head entwine,
For time will mark full many a day,
Till head and heart shall live, like thine.⁵²

Thomas Frederick Young

⁵² Thomas Frederick Young, "Thomas Moore." Poem, n.d. Project Gutenberg Literary Archive.

CHAPTER III

BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND HIS FOLK SONG SETTINGS OF *MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES*

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) is the most well-known composer in the lineage of these melodies. He was touted by some, including his own mother, to be the last of the monolithic “four B’s” of Western musical history: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Britten. His compositional achievements spanned from enormously complex operas and symphonic works to numerous pieces for the voice, both choral and art song. He actively sought to redefine the national British sound through his own avante garde approach to music, and by contributing his extensive reworked realizations of Henry Purcell. From his personal life, scholars often name Britten’s defining characteristics as his homosexuality and his commitment to pacifism. While these aspects of his life certainly are important, Britten’s complex spirituality, morality, and receptiveness to other cultures equally contribute to his personality and music.

Britten’s childhood setting was somewhat picturesque: a middle-class lifestyle on the shores of north Suffolk. It would seem that life was not completely ideal, however beautiful the natural surroundings. The youngest of four children, Britten was somewhat harshly treated by his perfectionist father and alternatively coddled and doted upon by his mother, Edith. She was his constant devotee and supporter in regard to his musical talent. However, she would be the source of many conflicting emotions throughout his life, causing him to experience opposing feelings of immense love and dependency, but also

resentment of the potential hold she had over his life. In addition to some of the emotional turmoil of his complicated parental relationships, Britten would be plagued his whole life with health problems that resulted from a bout of pneumonia he endured at three months of age. What emerged from these intense physical and emotional situations was an incredibly talented, extremely sensitive young musician, and may have been the inspiration for the “theme of the vulnerability of innocence which is to pervade his whole life’s work.”⁵³ His early schooling did little to create mental stability, as he was horrified at the bullying treatment of his fellow students by the teachers and headmasters. His own music professor engaged in much berating about Britten’s early compositions, and the young man’s extensive diaries and letters to his mother display intense fits of depression and even suicidal thoughts.⁵⁴

One guiding constant in Britten’s musical and compositional development was his private lessons with Frank Bridge, an established modern composer with whom he became acquainted through one of his early string teachers. While Britten received mixed messages about his musical talent from various professors throughout his academic career, Bridge was a continuous supporter. Even during Britten’s college years at the Royal Conservatory of Music, where he received tutelage from musical greats such as Vaughan Williams, Ireland, and Elgar, he retained preference for Bridge’s modernism and refused to adhere to the school of pastoral “folk” style that seemed to be promoted at the Conservatory. He spoke boldly in his journals that he wished to have an

⁵³ Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten: A Biography* (New York: Scribners u.a., 1993).

⁵⁴ Jennifer Doctor et al., “Britten, (Edward) Benjamin,” in *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, 2001.

absolute removal from the kind of “Englishness” that may be associated with the Edwardian pomp and pageantry of Elgar, or later characterized in the watery meadows and ‘gaffers on the green’ modal meanderings and rustic frolics of the school of the English folklorists.⁵⁵

Though his music during the early period did exhibit Brahmsian influence, most likely through studies with Vaughan Williams, he maintained vehemently that he did not prescribe to the compositional vein of his teachers there. He instead gained interest in composers of the German school, such as Schoenberg and Berg. While he never adopted full serialism due to its disjunct nature and lack of melody, he did incorporate serialistic elements in his motivic structures. In fact, according to Donald Mitchell in *The Britten Companion*, it was Britten’s “pronounced melodic gift” which “marked him off, quite sharply, from much of his contemporaries—and conspicuously so from much Modernist aesthetic, which paid little attention to melody or was actively contemptuous to it.”⁵⁶

The 1930s proved to be a huge period of development for Britten, both emotionally and professionally. After stepping into the arena of film music, he became acquainted with influential filmmakers such as W.H. Auden and his political circle, a group of “left-wing, pacifist, agnostic, and queer”⁵⁷ individuals who began to encourage Britten to embrace his own homosexuality, which had been quite repressed. In a letter to Marjorie Fass about Auden, Britten explains his attraction and respect toward this new group of acquaintances:

⁵⁵ Mervyn Cooke and Eric Roseberry, *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁵⁶ Christopher Palmer, Donald Mitchell, and Peter Porter, *The Britten Companion* (Cambridgeshire, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ Grove Music Online, Brett.

He has a very wide knowledge . . . especially of politics; this last in the direction that I can't help feeling every serious person, and artists especially, must have. Strong opposition in every direction to Fascism, which of course restricts all freedom of thought.⁵⁸

It was during this period of self-exploration that a pivotal event occurred. In 1937, after a bout of the flu, Britten's mother, Edith, passed away. Britten was then to endure completely conflicted emotions. Due to the immense influence she had over his life, and her constant validation of his musical talent, he felt deep grief for the loss. However, he was now free to explore aspects of his life which he had kept repressed while she was alive. It was also during this year that Britten met his future life partner and performer of his folk song settings, Peter Pears.

Pears, who had recently returned to England from a successful tour in America, shared with Britten the new and exciting musical ideas that were forming in the New World. Britten, who already enjoyed the American aesthetic of Aaron Copland's music, decided that he and Pears would also tour there, stating he was "now definitely into my 'American' period, and nothing can stop me."⁵⁹ Over the course of four years, from 1939-1942, the duo performed throughout Canada and northeast America, eventually residing in New York with Pears's close friend, Elizabeth Mayer. The trip was fatiguing, due mostly to Britten's preexisting health conditions flaring up, but the positive outcome of the time away was that he and Pears finally realized and consummated their romantic relationship. Britten still managed to engage in constant evaluation of both himself and

⁵⁸ Carpenter, 70.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 124.

the musical scene surrounding him. He grew to loathe New York and its constantly changing whims, and surprisingly stated, “You see—I’m gradually realizing that I’m English—and as a composer I suppose I feel I want more definite roots than other people.”⁶⁰ This far cry from the pooh-poohing of his pastoral predecessors was perhaps a realization about his own interest in leaving not merely a musical legacy, but an English one. It was during these performance years that his first folk song arrangements surfaced, usually as encores to round out the recitals. The first publication of the folksongs was in 1943, with songs from the British Isles. While aesthetically pleasing, they are neither his most complex nor riveting compositions, but are written much in the fashion of Schubert. Many have compared Britten’s knack for melody and motivic treatment as being inspired by the German king of lieder,⁶¹ in which a character motive is repeated throughout the song, creating an overall sense of mood, as opposed to direct textual painting. Another important observation about these British Isles folk songs is Britten’s lack of research about their authenticity. For instance, the lovely tune of “Down By the Sally Gardens” originates from an Irish melody, not a British one, but is included in this first volume of folksongs. Eric Roseberry claims that “it shows Britten as a composer-arranger (rather than a folksong collector) who is concerned in the first place with realizing the emotional content of his text and taking the tune as he finds it from whatever available source, ‘authentic’ or ‘corrupt.’”⁶² This is a practice directly linked to Brahms’s German folk songs, in which the composer gladly set any text or melody he found to be stimulating. It

⁶⁰ Carpenter, 142.

⁶¹ Palmer, Mitchell, and Porter, 272.

⁶² Cooke and Roseberry, 293.

is also an important link to Thomas Moore, who recognized the emotional partnership between his powerful text and the traditional melodies.

It was not until 1957 that the fourth volume of folksongs was published, *Moore's Irish Melodies*. In between had been volumes two and three, a set of French songs and another British Isles set. These Irish melodies began to change his approach to folksong, in compositional technique and in mood. Perhaps he had become so aggravated about his own country's folk tradition that he was searching elsewhere. From his fiery article from his time in America in 1941, called "England and the Folk-Art Problem":

The chief attractions of English folksongs are the sweetness of the melodies, the close connection between words and music, and the quiet, uneventful charm of the atmosphere. This needfulness however is part of the weakness of the tunes, which seldom have any striking rhythms or memorable melodic features. Like much of the English countryside, they creep into the affections rather than take them by storm.

English folksong . . . has not continued to evolve like that of many Central European countries, or the songs of the Appalachians, or of Scotland . . .

This decline raises the whole general problem of the nature of folk-art. The nearest approach to folk-music today is swing or the Negro spiritual.

Folksongs are concise and finished little works of art. When used as raw material they tend to obstruct thinking in the extended musical forms. Works founded on them are usually little more than variations or potpourris. Again, each folksong has completely suggested harmonic scheme—so that it should sound satisfactory when sung unaccompanied—and much deviation therefore tends to produce a feeling of irritation.

All these characteristics tend to make folksong a most restricting influence, which, as a matter of fact, is no doubt what many composers have wanted. Lacking the necessary discipline they forget that discipline must come from within.⁶³

⁶³ Paul Kildea, *Britten on Music* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 32–34.

It would seem that Britten had a complicated view of the folk music of England. On the one hand, as the above quotes show, he felt that his country's folksongs were no longer a current part of British life and needed not to be romanticized or glorified. On the other hand, he praised Australian composer Percy Grainger's active recording and collecting of British folksongs, in which Grainger traveled the English countryside with a sound recorder, then painstakingly transcribed the tunes. Being a well-trained musician within his home country certainly gave Britten a strong understanding and authority to criticize, but there was another layer to peel back regarding his visceral disgust with British folksong. Britten's active political pacifism led him to have strong negative views regarding Fascism, political oppression, and nationalism. Bearing witness to the extremism of nationalistic pride that both led up to and resulted from World War II across Europe, Britten was ever aware of the dangers of how quickly pride could change to inequality, and eventually to oppression and violence. He once bitterly observed that "there is no more malignant disease than nationalism."⁶⁴

Britten's sensitivity to political oppression and deep empathy toward those who experienced injustice resembles the moral code of Thomas Moore. Britten, who fondly remembered being moved by the folksongs that the Scottish women would sing from the shore where his family vacationed, would likely be drawn to the ancient harping tunes that had already captured the hearts of so many in the preceding century. This innate sense of melody with which Britten has been credited, paired with the knowledge of Moore's struggle for Catholic Emancipation and equality under the Ascendancy,

⁶⁴ Kildea, 27.

produced the ideal combination to hold Britten's attention. Moore also might have been an appealing figure to Britten because of his choice to fight injustice through his words, instead of resorting to violence like so many of his revolutionary contemporaries. The other defining catalyst that led to his arrangements of the former harp tunes was through his becoming aware of the great Welsh harper named Osian Ellis. Welsh harping traditions date back as anciently as those of the Irish, if not before, and the "exotic" music of Ellis's playing must have satisfied Britten's need to look outside of the British folksong repertoire for inspiration. Britten would go on to compose numerous pieces for Ellis, and incorporate him as a harpist in his larger works, such as his opera, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Graham Johnson, a noted collaborative pianist, vocal coach, and scholar on Britten's art song, remarks,

This express admiration of Celtic culture was nothing new. It is notable that "The Salley Gardens," the very first song in Volume I, and probably the most famous of Britten's arrangements, is an *Irish* melody put together with a poem by W.B. Yeats. Even if by chance, this underlines the fact that Irish music has always been something of a special case in the history of folksong arrangement.⁶⁵

For a man who documented so many personal opinions and feelings through journaling and letters, Britten remarkably did not reveal what his ultimate reason was for setting *Moore's Irish Melodies*. Whatever his motivation, it led to a select ten-song settings of Moore's versions of the Irish melodies in 1957. Even his forward to his 1960

⁶⁵ Graham Johnson, *Britten, Voice & Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003), 85.

publication of *Moore's Irish Melodies*, the composer only offers a short blurb about their conception:

All the texts of these songs are from Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, published between 1808 and 1834—in one case from the slightly later *National Melodies*. In most instances I have also taken the tunes from the same sources (music arranged by Sir John Stevenson); however, in a few cases I have preferred to go back to Bunting's *Ancient Music of Ireland*, which had in the first place inspired Tom Moore to write his lyrics.⁶⁶

It is difficult to conceive that despite all his rantings about the dullness of British folksong and the equally uninspired compositions it generated, Britten did not muster up one sarcastic comment about Sir John Stevenson's lacking accompaniment. Perhaps it was his general attitude of levity toward folksong arranging. Graham Johnson again addresses Britten's initial intent behind his folksong arrangements:

Britten makes his folksong settings a lighter thing than his older contemporaries: he is not awed by the music's provenance . . . Britten's collections are surely not meant for the folksong expert, they are rather a gift, and an important one, to the recitalist . . .

Yes, these Britten folksongs *are* arty (in a way that Grainger's are not), and that's the fun of them. They were written to end Pear's and Britten's own recitals—a dessert course, if you like, to an evening's musical repast. These are not so much arrangements as 'liederisations' . . .⁶⁷

Again, this is a description of Volumes I, III, and V, the British Isles folk settings, but Johnson concedes that Volume IV, *Moore's Irish Melodies*, does approach the musical material with more respect and solemnity:

⁶⁶ Kildea, 377.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 66–67.

. . . Volume IV of Britten's *Folksong Arrangements* seems less 'fun' than the other volumes, and why the settings are also, in my opinion, often more profound. They have a different, more serious, aim: an engagement with issues especially associated with Irish music and poetry. Among these are (a) the harp seen (and heard) as an emblem of a separate national identity, (b) the continuing struggle of a small nation against a larger, (c) the laments associated with senseless bereavement (in this case the towering 'Last Rose of Summer'), and (d) the power of memory to revisit happier times. One should also remember that these songs were arranged at a time when it was reasonable (and not unusual) for someone of Britten's liberal persuasions to see the history of Ireland in the light of its subjugation at the hands of arrogant bullies.⁶⁸

While Britten would not have been in favor of the sentimental or indulgent performances which Moore would have employed, the powerful lyrics seemed to have resonated on a deep level of intellect and identity. Britten felt empathy for the injustice bestowed upon the Irish people, and smartly utilized Moore's pieces which spoke to the fruitless pain of violence and the innocence of childhood.

Whether intentional or not, Britten played an important role as another link in the chain of these melodies, their development, and their distribution. The melodies had been passed down from the bards to an Irish archivist, to the parlors of the British elite via an Irish-born poet, and finally to the pen of a highly accomplished British composer. Due to his legacy of composition and pedagogy, Britten's settings have entered standard repertoire lists for students and professionals alike. The skilled composer managed to remedy what was mistaken in Moore's publications and added thoughtful, imaginative, and stirring accompaniments to the already beautiful melodies and lyrics. His respectful treatment of Moore's poetry acted as a peace offering of reconciliation, offered to the

⁶⁸ Johnson, 90.

Irish people through Britten on behalf of England. In his ambassadorial act, Britten combatted the musical nationalism that he so vehemently opposed.

The attempt to create a national music is only one symptom of a serious and universal malaise of our time—the refusal to accept the destruction of “community” by the machine . . . It is only those who accept their loneliness and refuse all the refuges, whether of tribal nationalism or airtight intellectual systems, who will carry on the human heritage.

Benjamin Britten

CHAPTER IV

IMPRESSIONS OF IRISH MUSIC IN THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

In the following analysis of Britten's *Moore's Irish Melodies* settings, one of the parameters of examination is that of "Irish musical elements" within the arrangements. It is necessary to first establish what "Irish" means in the context of this analysis. In order to avoid the criticism of misinterpreting the identity of Irish music, this paper will proceed with the understanding that the Irish musical elements discussed will be derived from common *perceptions* of Irish music during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, without the intention of defining Irish music itself. The purpose is not to make a definitive statement about an entire culture's identity, but to attempt to view Irish music through the lens which Britten would have used. While many sources clearly state a particular point of view about Irish music, there is no source on which everyone agrees constitutes the final say about Irish musical identity. To modern readers, some of these sources may seem to employ stereotypes or oversimplify nuanced information. It is important to be aware of these perceptions, however, and they are what will dictate the details of the "Irish musical elements" portion of this analysis.

It is difficult to determine characteristics that are inherently Irish, when every time period from Saint Patrick onward has held connection to the European mainland. Saint Patrick, through his peaceful conversion of the Irish people from pagan to Christian, founded the strong tradition of very learned monasteries through Ireland,

beginning in the fifth century. These literate monks diligently transcribed countless works from all over Western civilization, even those not pertaining to religion. Through their immense interest and efforts in preserving literature, history, and music, the Irish “saved [Western] civilization,” as Thomas Cahill’s book title reads.⁶⁹ Because of their transcriptions and physical remoteness due to Ireland’s far west island status, mainland Europe and its culture was saved from destruction during the various waves of invaders during the dark centuries that followed. Cahill mentions that joy and profound curiosity of the Irish monks with literature:

They did not see themselves as drones. Rather, they engaged the text they were working on, tried to comprehend it after their fashion, and, if possible, add to it, even improve on it . . . Like the Jews before them, the Irish enshrined literacy as their central religious act.⁷⁰

This tradition of worldly and literate education would appear to clash with the bardic oral tradition, but the two practices would meld together in the personage of Prince Columcille, an important Irish figure in the 500s. Destined for pagan kingship, he had originally been trained in the bardic practices of his ancestors, but became “Romanized” and joined the monastic brotherhood. Through Columcille, Ireland became a unique hybrid of both pagan and Christian traditions, as can be seen in its fascinating art, music, literature, and religious imagery. One of the many gifts that the monks brought to Ireland and Europe was their willingness to share their knowledge, not withholding anything

⁶⁹ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

from those wishing to learn. This may have gone against the grain of the bardic tradition somewhat, as the loyalty of each clan lay claim to its own history and information.

Again, Columcille smoothed over the differences of the two groups, recognizing the importance of the bards to the Irish people. Again, Cahill:

Also on the agenda was a proposal to suppress the order of bards, admittedly a troublesome lot, whose satires were potent enough to kill and who took the most presumptuous advantage wherever they happened to camp. Poetry, said Columcille (who was himself the most accomplished poet of his day) was an essential part of Irish life: Ireland could not be Ireland without it. Do not banish the bards, only command that they widen their circle and teach others what they know. An irresistible proposal from an irresistible humanist. As Columcille's proposal carried the assembly, twelve hundred merry bards crowded into the meeting, singing the praises of the saint, who, red-faced, pulled to his chin the cowl of his white wool cloak in order to hide his embarrassment.⁷¹

As the centuries progressed, the entirety of the British Isles would be conquered again and again by various foreign groups, from the Angles and Saxons, to the Vikings, and eventually the French with William the Conqueror in 1066. Unfortunately, all the violent raids and plundering left Ireland's monasteries in ruins, and many of her scholars slaughtered. The destruction of infrastructure through the Dark Ages catalyzed the Elizabethan colonization and harsh penal laws, which eventually gave way to the Ascendency reign that fed the fervor of Bunting and Moore. Through these numerous cultural exchanges, Ireland again retained many of its own customs, while assimilating, this time forcefully, to the ruling culture. Bardic epic poetry and song transformed into *lays*, which were heroic songs written in third person that conveyed a historical event or

⁷¹ Cahill, 186.

point in time. Narrative lays are the oldest form of storytelling in song, dating back to the Middle Ages.⁷² As time moved forward to Bunting's time, lays were typically recited as poetry, or 'aithris.' There were also *ballads*, derived from the European model, in which a more personal story might be told in either first or third person, often formatted in strophes. While ballads did not originate in Ireland, they quickly became standard there, as they were a stellar outlet for expression and storytelling. Detailed records of the ballad's evolution in Ireland are not to be found, but from the 1700s onward, they began to be printed in Dublin, likely emerging from an interest in reclaiming folk music and art. There were already concessions being made in terms of retaining the Irish language, as Hugh Shields writes:

In Ireland, even from the 1780s and 1790s, it [the ballad] was often a special expression of national sentiment. Preference was given to songs in Irish, and since many collectors and the majority of their public knew little Irish, the national aspiration often focused on the alternative ethnic symbol of melody. Thus airs were often noted from songs in Irish the words of which were left behind. Even if the words were in English—the language of ballads—musical collectors seldom bothered with words.⁷³

This intermingling of harping and singing practices in favor of strong melodic content led to a cohesion of Irish music across genres. Harp tunes became lyrical, while singing styles began to emulate the embellishments of instruments. *Sean-nós* ("old way") singing, as twentieth-century scholars deemed it, emerged as an expressive means to sing poetry, full of text-painting and emotional vocal embellishments. Sean Williams writes,

⁷² Hugh Shields, *Narrative Singing in Ireland: Lays, Ballads, Come-All-Yes and Other Songs* (Blackrock County, Dublin: 1993).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 50.

The collapse of the old Gaelic Order and the dissolution of the patronage system for bards combined with the prohibitions by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I against harpers and musicians resulted in the loss of many of the old poetic meters (specific patterns of vowels and rhythms), together with the actual poetry that the bards had performed. During this time of cultural implosion, the most prominent and highly trained bards gave way to contemporary composers of *sráid-éigse*—“street poetry.” These new verse-makers were often itinerant singers, writing in much more simple poetic meters than what had been composed before. After a time, the street poetry evolved into *sean-nós*—the venerable “old style” as it is known today. “It was only after the complete break-up of the Gaelic polity, after the wars of Cromwell and of William, that the verse-maker merges in the musician, and the harper and the bard become fused in one” (Hyde 1910: 497).⁷⁴

Sean-nós performance laid emphasis on both the textual significance and the expression of the performer’s voice and the Irish language. This style of singing is typically done unaccompanied, and most often in an unmetered, free fashion that allows the singer the time to convey the poetry that he or she is performing. The form of the poetry is surprisingly straightforward, usually consisting of either four- or eight-lined stanzas, but the vocal and melodic treatment of this plain form varies throughout the regions of Ireland. It is easy to see the link between the *sean-nós* style of singing and Thomas Moore’s personal performances of his settings of old Irish tunes. The purpose of both was to bring attention to the emotional content within the poetry and to vocally display that emotion through various ornaments or fluctuations in musical time. Moore was known to move his listeners to tears with his heart-felt performances of his poetry, in which he used the beauty and expression of his voice to convey the gravity of his text.

⁷⁴ Sean Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*, Focus on World Music Series (New York, London: Routledge, 2010).

It can be assumed that some sort of vocal melisma or embellishment would be an included element in Britten's settings of the *Melodies*. There are other elements to address in regard to "Irishness," however. An important one is the use of modality that slightly deviates from the standard Western classical approach to harmony. In addition to the usual Ionian (major) and Aeolian (natural minor) modes that Western music uses, Irish music also tends heavily toward Dorian and Mixolydian modes, which brandish a strong flatted seventh degree of the scale. To Western ears, which gravitate toward the tiny half step of a raised seventh degree, this lowered leading tone is a clear indicator of a mode that lies outside the realm of standard. In addition to identifying the melody as Irish, this lowered step can also carry emotional weight, and is effective in performance of these melodies. Like many cultures, there is also use of pentatonic scales, weaving strong melodies whose underlying harmony can be both clearly heard, yet open enough to be reinterpreted. Annie Patterson, a music scholar who wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, in her fervor for her native Ireland, attempts to justify a "national" sound through her observations of its music. While she may be biased in some of her opinions, she nevertheless makes some interesting observations about Irish music:

It seems highly probable that **Harmony** first came into practice through the discovery by the harpers that pleasant sound-combinations could be produced by striking three or more strings simultaneously; whence they evolved the so-called major and minor chords and their inversions.⁷⁵

Irish folk-music comes to us from two sources, albeit each shares much the same characteristics . . . First, we have the genuine harp-music, which has been handed down through generations of bards and their successors, the itinerant harpers of

⁷⁵ Patterson, "The Folk-Music of Ireland: Its Past, Present, and Future Aspects," *The Musical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1920): 459.

the middle ages. Along with this developed the more distinctively people's music of the rural districts—much memorised on the voice or the country fiddle after the harp became extinct. This music of the roadside and the country fairs evolved, in particular, the dance-forms... **The former (the Harp Music) has given to us all the most perfectly developed and more or less 'fixed' tunes.**⁷⁶

[Regarding 'The Foggy Dew'] Consisting, as Bunting has annotated it, of 24 bars, we find to start with a well-defined 4-bar theme, which is repeated. Then, we have a middle section, also of four bars, with a rise in pitch, containing a suggestion of key-change. This is followed by a repeat of four bars, with a full close, of the opening phrase. Finally, the last eight bars are repeated. **Here we have sonata-form in embryo**, the foundation of the highest triumph of the classical composer's art.⁷⁷

... the **avoidance of the modern sharp (raised) leading-note**, as proceeding from the tonic. Many modern 'arrangers' of Irish melodies have wholly spoiled the spirit of the ancient tunes by sharpening the seventh... Still another characteristic, or rather native touch, in Irish tunes is the **reiteration of the tonic at the close of a tune**, suggestive of the plagal, or Amen cadence... we still trace pre-eminently the avoidance of the modern leading-note and the suggestion of a **change of mode from minor to major.**⁷⁸

[Regarding harp tuning] A moment's thought will show the intelligent musician that this very method of tuning the ancient Irish harp—and there can be no doubt it was a remote traditional one—favours the existence of a pentatonic seventh as *possible* intervals—if, at the same time, intervals to be *avoided*. I believe this principle of scale formation to furnish the main characteristic of the ancient Irish melodies... **this trace of a pentatonic scale with fourth and seventh rather avoided than omitted—is, nevertheless, of such frequency as to give a marked individuality to our music.**⁷⁹

I will only, in conclusion, draw your attention to one of the most striking of all traits in our music, and that is **the perfect symmetry and regularity in the structure of its ancient melodies.**⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Patterson, "The Folk-Music of Ireland," 460.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 462.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 463.

⁷⁹ Patterson, "The Characteristic Traits of Irish Music," 97.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 107.

Amidst some of the sentimental and flowery language, Patterson does bring attention to some interesting details about Irish music: 1) Not only melody, but harmony is intrinsic and important to Irish music, 2) the pentatonic scale and the lowered seventh are heavily used as modal foundations in the crafting of melody, and 3) there are clear structural and repeated elements in the construction of the tunes. She also confirms the origin of Moore's use of three equally emphasized syllables at the end of his stanzas, seen here as a "reiteration of the tonic."

James Travis, in his 1938 article, "Irish National Music," takes a harsher stance about the destruction of Irish music by the British:

Harpers suffered not only these things from foreign rule, but the loss of their patrons . . . Taste declined, owing to foreign dominance and especially to the official efforts, largely successful, to eliminate education . . . The passing of the harpers meant the loss of their music, which included forms purely instrumental . . . The documentary preservation of Irish music began as a conscious movement after fine elements in the musical tradition had been almost completely destroyed. The music that survived usually represented the taste of an untutored people.⁸¹

His article goes on to discuss similar aspects of Irish music as Patterson's regarding form, melody, and harmony. He offers detailed examples of phrase structures (not many of which resemble Patterson's claim of "sonata form") and uses of various modes, dispelling the idea that Irish music only uses a flattened seventh in the scale. However, he generally does reinforce that pentatonic and hexatonic scales are prevalent, and that harp music typically avoids particular scale degrees in order to create pleasing harmony.

⁸¹ James Travis, "Irish National Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (October 1938): 451–2.

The fragment of harp music noted by Bunting from Hempson reveal an harmonic style that a study solely of the pentatonic melody of the fragment would not indicate . . . Bardic harp music joined an almost **continuous chordal accompaniment** to its melodies. In their exercises, ancient harpers rendered melody over a ground bass of tonic and dominant chords... On the decline of the harp, it was the piper who secured fame as the *virtuoso*. His instrument provided **drone harmonies** that could be very thrilling.

Modulation between modes is a means of achieving great contrast within a small compass,—the utmost in compression, intensity, and surprise. In Irish airs, modulation is usually effected without alteration of intervals, though sometimes . . . between **parallel modes**.⁸²

Travis's observations support Patterson's claims of Irish music incorporating harmony from an early time and of the prevalent use of mode shifting within a singular tune. It is likely that the points these two authors made echoed the general sentiments about the nature of Irish music at the time, which Benjamin Britten would have come across in his quest for discovering quality folk music. A concluding quote from Travis offers insight into why Britten might have set *Moore's Irish Melodies* so much more thoughtfully than those of the British Isles:

Nothing is more strange than the persistence of erroneous views fostered by Bunting and his contemporaries, unless it be neglect of the structure of the music, the want of a broad treatment of its modes, and the inadequate appreciation of its harmonic resources . . . The social dissolution that caused the ancient harp music to disintegrate drew the remnants of an aristocratic tradition more closely to the people. With the already sterile upper layers worn away, a musical sub-soil of immense richness lay exposed, from the 16th century.

The oppression that isolated the Irish rarefied the spirit of their music. Instrumentalists, harried through the by-ways, so long as moved to music, sought a distinctive art that would be all-sufficing. Not until vulgarizing influences, such as the use of English, had penetrated, did a music of matchless refinement begin to show dross. While Irish culture endured, a sense of style unattainable

⁸² Travis, 475–6.

elsewhere could have been absorbed by natives with the language. Only the disintegration of the culture has made enormities possible,—the conversion of old slow airs to waltzes, and “Mother Machree”, and the so-called national anthem. The enemies of distinction have at last conquered—made the Irish like themselves.⁸³

⁸³ Travis, 479–80.

CHAPTER V

MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF BRITTEN'S *MOORE'S IRISH MELODIES*

The analysis portion of this paper is intended to be used as a reference for pedagogues, students, and professional performers who wish to gain further insight into Britten's pieces. They will be analyzed through the parameters of 1) Britten's treatment of Moore's original melodies, 2) aspects of the accompaniment, 3) text painting or mood setting, and 4) interpretation or addition of perceived Irish musical elements.

I. Avenging and bright

Avenging and bright fall the swift sword of Erin
On him who the brave sons of Usna betrayed!
For ev'ry fond eye which he waken'd a tear in,
A drop from his heartwounds shall weep o'er her blade.

By the red cloud which hung over Conner's dark dwelling,
When Ulad's three champions lay sleeping in gore
By the billows of war which so often high swelling,
Have wafted these heroes to victory's shore!

We swear to avenge them! –no joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed,
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
Till vengeance be wreaked on the murderer's head!

Yes, monarch! though sweet are our home recollections,
Though sweet are the tears that from tenderness fall;
Though sweet are our friendships, our hopes and affections,
Revenge on a tyrant is sweetest of all.

A setting of the folk tune *Crooghan a venee*, “properly written *Cruachàn na Fèine*, i.e., the Fenian mount,”⁸⁴ “Avenging and Bright” is a dynamic piece that incites the blood to boil through its combination of fiery text and articulated accompaniment. Britten keeps Moore’s melody nearly intact, but omits the grace notes that would usually occur at measure 9 and measure 17. Measure 17 is also missing the snappy dotted eighth and sixteenth rhythm that would normally cadence each verse. These smoothened melodic changes produce a more legato line for the singer, while allowing the accompaniment to create much of the emotional character for the song. The most prominent motivic figure in the accompaniment is the downward arpeggiation that accents the first beat of each measure. This figure is a reference to the technique of the Irish harp, in which chords are strummed from the top pitch downward, due to the arrangement of the instrument’s strings.

The song retains Moore’s original key of B minor, and decisively drones a low B as the bass note for the first eight bars, likening to the ever-present hum of the Irish uilleann pipes. The harmonies Britten pits against the tonic B create the tension that effectively represent the bellicose text. The first two verses’ structure resembles Moore’s strophic setting, utilizing a simple repeat sign in order to return to the second verse. The third verse, where the text changes to “We swear to avenge them!” and breaks forth from the strophic structure, changes mood in the accompaniment, suddenly quieting and adding a rumbling bass counterpoint. The counter-melody weaves in and out of the

⁸⁴ Thomas Moore, *Revised and Enlarged Moore’s Irish Melodies, with Symphonies and Accompaniments by Various Eminent Authors; Characteristic Words by Thomas Moore* (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1893).

singer's melody, sometimes paralleling for a few notes, then veering off in the opposite direction. This hushed intensity allows the determination of the singer's character to be prominent. The song finally ends with a return to the initial downward arpeggiated harp motive, this time falling to a B, to double the bass tonic. In the first two verses, the arpeggios fell to an F#, the fifth of the key. The fact that Britten returns to tonic in the last verse reinforces the decisiveness and strength of the lyrics. The last two measures have the option to take the melody up the octave on "sweetest of all," as if to especially punctuate a last iteration of bitterness.

II. How sweet the answer

How sweet the answer Echo makes
To music at night;
When, rous'd by lute or horn, she wakes,
And far away, o'er lawns and lakes,
Goes answering light.

Yet love hath echoes truer far,
And far more sweet,
Than e'er beneath the moonlight's star,
Of horn or lute, or soft guitar,
The songs repeat.

'Tis when the sigh, in youth sincere,
And only then
The sigh, that's breath'd for one to hear,
Is by that one, that only dear,
Breath'd back again.

"How sweet the answer," or "Echo," as Graham Johnson says Moore titled the original, is neither found in the 1893 revision of *Moore's Irish Melodies*, nor is it listed under its original tune name of "The Wren" in Bunting's *Ancient Music of Ireland*.

Britten must have chosen the piece from one of Moore's earlier publications, and Moore must have adapted it from a folk melody that was not in Bunting's collection.

The first striking feature, even when glancing at the poem, is the non-standard rhyming pattern of ABAAB. The A lines contain eight syllables, while the B lines only contain five. The beautiful text plays upon the personification of an echo and its similarities to the behaviors of fond memories that return to the brain after many years. Britten fully indulges in the aural depiction of an echo, which is seen in the motive in measures 3 and 4. He uses the effect of planing in bitonality to represent two moments in time: the present, and the sweet memory that is being nostalgically remembered. The "echo" motive's upper note functions within the key signature, around the tonic B. The highest notes represent the present time of the narrator, and they are rooted in the reality of tonality. The lower notes, however, parallel the functional top notes at the interval of a fourth. When simultaneously played, these lower notes color the tonality with a hazy dreaminess, beautiful and non-tonal.

The first verse, describing the aural perception of an echo, is presented through the use of rocking cluster chords and the echo motive. In the second verse, when there is a transition from reality to memory, Britten adds eerie bass octaves on second beats of the slow 6/8 measures. While initially sounding menacing, the bass notes mainly act to destabilize the reality of the present, represented by the B major key signature. During the last verse, the tonic B is reiterated in the bass, as if the narrator is attempting to return to reality. As he or she recalls the lover's sigh, reciprocated and "breathed back again," Britten creates a different echo motive out of the last two notes of the phrase, creating a

short descending slur. This two-note gesture is reminiscent of many “sigh” motives in Western classical music, as it banters wistfully back and forth with the initial echo motive of the piece.

While this song is beautifully atmospheric in its employment of text painting, there are not apparent efforts to highlight overtly Irish musical traits within the music. The 6/8 meter and the irregular poetic structure vaguely allude to stereotypical perceptions of Irish features, but they are not clear enough references to indicate that the piece is anything other than a well-crafted art song. As Graham Johnson suggests, the text of this song, expressing an idealization of youth’s innocence, may have been the attraction to Britten rather than any inherent “Irishness.”

III. Sail on, sail on

Sail on, sail on, thou fearless bark,
Wherever blows the welcome wind;
It cannot lead to scenes more dark,
More sad than those we leave behind.

Each smiling billow seems to say
“Tho’ death beneath our surface be,
Less cold we are, less false than they,
Whose smiling wreck’d thy hopes and thee.”

Sail on, sail on, through endless space,
Through calm, through tempest, stop no more;
The stormiest sea’s a resting place
To him who leaves such hearts on shore.

Or, if some desert land we meet,
Where never yet false-hearted men

Profaned a world, that else were sweet,
Then rest thee, bark, but not till then.

“Sail on, sail on” is a prime instance of Moore setting a text that relates to the tune’s original title. *The Humming of the Ban* presumably refers to the sound of the Bann River, located in northern Ireland.⁸⁵ There is a slight discrepancy in the revised American publication of *Moore’s Irish Melodies*, in which the editor has renamed the original tune as *The Humming of the Bars*. The reason for the different translation is not explained.

Britten’s setting of the tune deploys a Schubertian approach to the text, conveying the lapping motion of the waters by using rocking motives in the accompaniment. There are crescendos and decrescendos to swell particular measures, but the general dynamic is *piano*. The minimalist motivic treatment lulls the listener into a trance, where “endless space” seems to be aurally simulated. While the melody remains untouched, except for the elongation of the three last notes, the harmony is what conveys the text effectively. The melody is written in F major, completely diatonic, while the accompaniment listlessly wafts around the key center of F, never fully landing on the tonic. The bass line especially seems to function in a completely different key and is what contributes to the eeriness in the piece.

The meandering keys are an effective method in representing the text. In Moore’s poem, the narrator has no sense of where he or she desires the water to take the vessel, but expresses that anywhere is better than the point of origin. The speaker even claims that landing at a desert would even be acceptable, as long as its inhabitants were loyal

⁸⁵ “Wanderings in Ireland, Northeast,” *Dublin University Magazine, a Literary and Political Journal* LVI (December 1860): 683.

and true. The text ends with a sense of weariness, punctuated by Britten's long tonic thrums in the melody on "not till then," utilizing the declamatory nature of the Irish triple-syllable phrase ending. Though the narrator ends definitively on the tonic F, the postlude floats into the ether and never resolves. The rocking motives climb higher as they die away, creating the aural equivalent to watching a boat travel farther and farther from view. This pensive setting conveys both the physical and emotional stagnation of the text's meaning.

IV. The Minstrel Boy

The Minstrel Boy to the war is gone,
In the ranks of death you'll find him;
His father's sword he hath girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him;

"Land of song!" said the warrior bard,
"Tho' all the world betrays thee,
One sword at least, thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

The Minstrel fell, but the foeman's chain
Could not bring that proud soul under;
The harp he lov'd ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder;

And said, "No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and brav'ry!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free,
They shall never sound in slavery!"

One of the more famous melodies from Moore's collection is "The Minstrel Boy." Adapted from the air *The Moreen*, it tells the story of the death of a young and brave Irish warrior bard. The character of the Minstrel Boy and the other allusions used

in the poem carry double entendres. Some may interpret the Minstrel Boy as symbolizing Ireland herself, while others believe that Moore was eulogizing his lost friends who loyally and idealistically had fought for the cause. Other evoked images include the bard's sword and harp, and the shackles of slavery. The defiance of the character is striking, as the Minstrel Boy rips the strings from his harp on his deathbed, rather than let it be abused by the enemy (in this case, the British). Perhaps Moore, a survivor of the patriotic conflict, was memorializing his dear friends who died for freedom's cause.

In comparing Moore's and Britten's settings of the song, it quickly becomes apparent that the two men thought differently about war. Moore's setting is triumphant, full of snappy rhythms and dramatic fermatas to highlight the pride of the martyred warrior. Britten chooses to alter the meter and the accompaniment to highlight his pacifist ideals. The text that showcases the zealotry of war is set in a jaunty, almost mocking fashion, with aggressive arpeggios strumming on the off beats. The unsteadiness conveys the hotheadedness of the youthful Minstrel Boy, which acts as a commentary on the glorification of war. However, in the second section of each verse, where the text shifts to more noble and idealistic tones, the harp-like accompaniment changes from brisk strumming to a lush arpeggiation of lengthened notes. This change of the accompaniment perhaps acts to beautify and validate the bard's justifications for violence. Britten has also indulged in Moore's optional anacrusis, which is taken up the octave. Likewise, at measure 13, he changes the pick-up note into a full octave, as opposed to the fourth that Moore had written. These huge leaps allow the singer to root

the phrase in a richer register of the voice, and infuse the performance with more dramatic emotion. Britten also uses dynamics to heighten the emotional impact of the text. While the first verse is marked at a declamatory *forte*, the second verse retreats into a grieving piano. The postlude ends at pianissimo, with no hint of the bravado of the Minstrel Boy remaining. The loss of the title character by the end of the piece is a sad reminder of the cost of war, from the composer who would soon compose his famous *War Requiem*, in commemoration of the souls lost in World War II.

V. At the mid hour of night

At the mid hour of night when stars are weeping, I fly
 To the lone vale we lov'd when life shone warm in thine eye;
 And I think that if spirits can steal from the region of air,
 To revisit past scenes of delight; thou wilt come to me there.
 And tell me our love is remembered e'en in the sky.

Then I'll sing the wild song, which once 'twas rapture to hear,
 When our voices, both mingling, breathed like one on the ear,
 And as Echo far off thro' the vale my sad orison rolls,
 I think, oh my Love! 'tis thy voice from the kingdom of souls
 Faintly answering still the notes which once were so dear!

“At the mid hour of night,” based on the tune *Molly, my Dear*, is another example of Britten’s pattern of choosing texts about memory and reliving past happiness. The poem’s ethereal subject matter begs for a peaceful, somber setting, which the original did not have. Again, the blame can likely be placed on Sir John Stevenson, as the offense lies in the piano accompaniment. Stevenson’s setting is marked *leggiero* and *allegretto*, resembling a waltz, and uses diatonic figures more fitting of a Mozart sonata than a song about death and love. Moore attempts a vocal embellishment in the form of grace notes

before those characteristic three note cadences, but at the lively tempo they don't hold much emotional weight.

Britten has a much more sensitive interpretation of the text, seen at first glance by the tempo marking of "very slow," and the time signature in 9/8. The change is from Stevenson's perky 3/8, which is often a time signature seen in scherzo movements of large orchestral works and piano sonatas. The 9/8 elongates the meter into a subdivided three, as opposed to 3/8's condensing of beats to feel full measures in one. Britten also writes a pronounced droning figuration on each strong beat, as to remind the singer of the steadiness and intentionality of his setting. These drones resound throughout the piece and anchor the tonality in the key of Eb. The only movement away from the tonic open fifth is the shift to the V and then the IV during the second half of each stanza. Other than these moments, the Eb drone thrums under the melody. Atop the droning are open chords spanning a ninth, which harmonically clash just enough to create intrigue in the accompaniment.

The other significant change Britten makes to the piece is an actual reworking of a portion of the melody. During the musical B section, the original melody begins the next line up a fifth from the final note of the preceding phrase. It then trips along in a sequence that is based on outlining triads, ending the phrase on the fourth scale degree of the key. Britten keeps the overall skeleton of this phrase, arriving at the expected fourth scale degree on "air," but his approach to the beginning of the phrase spans an octave instead of a fifth. His melody that follows moves stepwise, not by Moore's diatonic triadic thirds. While it helps bolster the emotional intent of the poem, it is a significant

deviation from Moore's original melody. The result is stunning, creating a lyrical vocal line that reinforces the otherworldly nature of the arrangement.

VI. Rich and rare

Rich and rare were the gems she wore,
And a bright gold ring on her wand she bore;
But O her beauty was far beyond
Her sparkling gems or [Britten uses "and her"] snow-white wand.

"Lady! dost thou not fear to stray,
So lone and lovely, thro' this bleak way?
Are Erin's sons so good or so cold
As not to be tempted by woman or gold?"

"Sir Knight! I feel not the least alarm;
No son of Erin will offer me harm;
For, tho' they love woman and golden store,
Sir Knight, they love honour and virtue more!"

On she went and her maiden smile
In safety lighted her round the green isle;
And blest for ever was she who relied
Upon Erin's honour and Erin's pride!

Adapted from the air, *The Summer is coming*, "Rich and rare" is the song most closely resembling a traditional ballad in which a story is told through dialogue. The seemingly simple poem holds darker meaning than it appears at first glance. There are four characters who either speak or are referred to: 1) the narrator, 2) the Lady, 3) the Knight, and 4) the sons of Erin. The narrator sets the scene in the beginning and informs the reader of the outcome at the end of the short story. He describes the Lady, who is adorned with precious gold and jewels and is strikingly beautiful. She encounters "Sir Knight," perhaps a characterization of an Englishman, who incredulously questions her

decision to roam the Irish landscape unaccompanied. The Knight implies that a woman with her possessions and beauty would surely be either robbed or raped by the savage men of Ireland. The Lady reassures him that while “Erin’s sons” do enjoy the tangible pleasures of life, they hold themselves to a higher degree of conduct and honor than to forcibly and violently take those pleasures from an innocent person. Her faith in the Irish proves to be well-founded, as she continues on her merry way unharmed. This tale appears to be a social commentary on British perceptions of the Irish people. The English had long described the Irish as a savage or barbaric people, needing to be tamed through political occupation. Moore, in four short stanzas, not only defends the Irish as a moral and non-violent people, but reveals the true nature of “The Knight,” the character who is the one who introduces these savage thoughts.

Britten’s setting of “Rich and rare” is perhaps the least inspired of the ten *Melody* settings. He keeps the melody mostly intact, but the time taken between each verse is minimal. This is opposed to Moore’s setting, which contains both a postlude and an echoing repetition of the last two lines of each stanza. Britten’s strength in his arrangement is a counterpoint melody which runs throughout the piece, often setting the tone for the following stanza. For instance, in the short interlude between verses one and two, the countermelody utilizes rhythmical elements of the main tune, but sets them in a different key, which creates an ominous foreshadowing of the Knight’s verse. During the last verse, the countermelody becomes a canonical echo of the singer’s line, but is transposed up a step. It is unclear what Britten intended to convey through this bitonal

clash, but the aural effect is unsettling. Perhaps Britten was using the piece as a means with which to hone his compositional techniques and nothing more.

VII. Dear Harp of my Country!

Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long;
When proudly, my own Island Harp! I unbound thee,
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song!

The warm lay of love and the light tone of gladness
Have waken'd thy fondest, thy liveliest thrill;
But so oft hast thou echo'd the deep sigh of sadness,
That e'en in thy mirth it will steal from thee still.

Dear Harp of my Country! farewell to thy numbers,
This sweet wreath of song is the last we shall twine;
Go, sleep with the sunshine of Fame on thy slumbers,
Till touch'd by some hand less unworthy than mine.

If the pulse of the patriot soldier, or lover,
Have throbb'd at our lay, 'tis *thy* glory alone;
I was but as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
And all the wild sweetness I waked was thy own!

This poem is one of Moore's most definitive and cherished of his patriotic works. It contains the familiar archetypes of the harp, the warrior bard, and the "wild sweetness" possessed by the Irish people. It is a testament to the power of music and its ability to express the full range of human emotion. When paired with the tune called *Kitty Tyrrel*, the result is a beautiful partnership of song and melody. Amusingly, though this familiar poem and melody fit together beautifully, it is Britten's doing and not Moore's. Moore used a similar air called *New Langolee*, which is very musically similar to *Kitty Tyrrel*. Both tunes are in 6/8 time, and share the same melodic rhythm and tonal skeletons. The

poem that Moore actually set to *Kitty Tyrrel* was another patriotic text, called “Oh! Blame Not the Bard,” which displays a similar text to “Dear Harp,” seen here in the first and last verses:

Oh! blame not the bard, if he fly to the bow’rs,
Where pleasure lies carelessly smiling at fame;
He was born for much more, and in happier hours,
His soul might have burn’d with a holier flame.

The string that now languishes loose o’er the lyre
Might have bent a proud bow to the warrior’s dart;
And the lip which now breathes but the song of desire
Might have pour’d the full tide of the patriot’s heart!

But tho’ glory be gone, and tho’ hope fade away,
Thy name, loved Erin, shall live in his songs;
Not e’en in the hour when his heart is most gay
Will he loose the remembrance of thee and they wrongs!

The stranger shall hear thy lament on his plains;
The sigh of thy harp shall be sent o’er the deep,
Till thy masters themselves, as they rivet thy chains,
Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep.

Britten’s hybrid of the “Dear Harp” text and the *Kitty Tyrrel* melody offers a different approach to the vocal line than seen in the previous arrangements of the *Melodies*. The tendency in the preceding songs was to simplify the ornamented melodies, creating a desirable *bel canto* effect. In “Dear Harp of my Country!” Britten reserves the *legato* for the accompaniment, which resembles a sustained, murmuring harp motive. The vocal line, alternatively, contains expressive, non-linear flourishes, some of which are not found in the original melody. It is unclear if Britten may have heard an example of *sean nós* singing and attempted to replicate it, or merely interpreted and

expanded upon Moore's original grace note indications. What *is* known is that Britten had exposure to Osian Ellis and his harp playing. Evoking the strumming of the harp, Britten's piano accompaniment features trickling triplets of open thirds and reinforcing bass notes. Despite the busyness of the accompaniment, the piece is centered around the beauty of the vocal line and its expressive depiction of the poetry.

VIII. Oft in the stilly night

Oft in the stilly night
 Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
 Fond Mem'ry brings the light
 Of other days around me:
 The smiles, the tears
 Of boyhood's years,
 The words of love then spoken;
 The eyes that shone,
 Now dimm'd and gone,
 The cheerful hearts now broken!
 Thus in the stilly night
 Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
 Sad Mem'ry bring the light
 Of other days around me.

When I remember all
 The friends, so link'd together,
 I've seen around me fall
 Like leaves in wintry weather,
 I feel like one
 Who treads alone
 Some banquet-hall deserted,
 Whose lights are fled,
 Whose garlands dead,
 And all but he departed!
 Thus in the stilly night
 Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
 Sad Mem'ry brings the light
 Of other days around me.

“Oft in the stilly night” is a unique piece in this set of ten, because Moore composed the tune, as part of his later collection of *National Airs*.⁸⁶ It is a fascinating view into Moore’s persona as a composer, as opposed to a wordsmith. There are compositional elements which lead the listener to believe he was attempting to recreate some of the non-standard characteristics of Irish melodies. The form of the poetry and phrases, for example, is an unfamiliar ABABCCDEEDABAB. Moore also chooses some intentional dotted rhythms that add character to his melody. For instance, the quick sixteenth note on “stilly” seems to simulate a shudder, and his elongated dotted rhythms on “Fond Mem’ry brings the light” emulate the feeling of triple meter for a moment. While these compositional tools are sophisticated choices in presenting the poetry, they do not particularly resemble the characteristics of the other collected Irish melodies.

Britten’s setting seems to address this duality that plagued Moore: he was ethnically Irish, but was not able to truly capture the Irish folk essence. In Britten’s piece, the vocal part remains in the original 2/4, although the tempo is shifted from the march-like approach of Moore’s to the new indication of “Dreamily.” Again, Britten displays his gravitation toward scenes of remembrance, suggesting a melancholic approach to the tempo and mood. The accompaniment is in 6/8, which aligns with the vocal line at every half bar. The result is a clash between the feeling of duples and triplets between the two parts. Similar to the ethereal effect of memory used in “In the mid hour of night,” the accompaniment’s triplets give an otherworldly impression, as an unrelenting reminder to the narrator of his past. The choice of using 6/8 meter also could

⁸⁶ Johnson, 99.

be a reference to the Irish self that Moore struggled to find, in conflict with the simpler 2/4 that indicates his English self. Whatever Britten's motivation was behind the abrasive juxtaposition, it is an effective tool for setting the scene. It conveys a feeling of sleep paralysis where "slumber's chain has bound me," locking the narrator into painful memories of loss.

IX. The last rose of summer

'Tis the last rose of summer,
Left blooming alone;
All her lovely companions
Are faded and gone;
No flow'r of her kindred,
No rosebud is nigh
To reflect back her blushes,
Or give sigh for sigh.

I'll not leave thee, thou lone one,
To pine on the stem;
Since the lovely are sleeping,
Go sleep thou with them;
Thus kindly I scatter
Thy leaves o'er the bed,
Where thy mates of the garden
Lie senseless and dead.

So soon may *I* follow,
When friendships decay,
And from love's shining circle
The gems drop away!
When true hearts lie wither'd,
And fond ones are flown,
Oh! who would inhabit
This bleak world alone?

"The last rose of summer," adapted from *Groves of Blarney*, is undoubtedly the best known of *Moore's Irish Melodies*. Its poignant text about grief and loneliness

resonates with listeners and performers around the world. From Moore's personal perspective, it was an homage to his fallen brethren like Robert Emmett, who died for the cause of Irish freedom. There is a certain degree of survivor's guilt within the text, through the personification of the rose. Moore, as the "Last Rose," watches as each of his kindred loved ones falls around him, leaving him as the sole survivor. His own words must have haunted him throughout his lifetime, as he eventually endured the deaths of each of his five children. The text must have resounded with Britten, touching the strings of his pacifist heart. After all, a portion of the message of the poem is about the horrible toll of violence and its lasting effects on those who survive it.

This is the one arrangement in Britten's *Moore's Irish Melodies* that both encapsulates the text and pays respectful homage to the original melody and its heritage. It is ironic that it is also the arrangement that alters its original melody the most. Britten channels the improvisatory nature of both harping and *sean nós* singing with his emotionally moving fermata moments, which coincide with the fermatas Moore indicated. Britten increases the intensity of the moment with each verse, eventually roaring into the last "flown." Unlike other arrangements in the collection, the accompaniment does not merely set the mood, but becomes an important character. Its arpeggiated patterns obviously reference a harp, but its impact is revealed in its harmonic function. From the beginning of the song, the "harp" consistently plays a cluster chord rooted on D, while all other elements are in Eb. The unique downward strumming affect that had been so striking in "Avenging and Bright" is now inverted into a static rippling effect, originating from the bass. This dissonance represents a harp that is either

unwilling or unable to play in tune, through either defiance or grief. It does not resolve to Eb major until the very last chord, by use of a strangely placed Picardy third. The sudden shift into a clear major cadence from the previous atonal accompaniment elicits a natural quizzical response. It begs the question of what Britten was conveying through this intentional ending. Perhaps the narrator reached his goal of being reunited in the afterlife with his loved ones, after asking, “Who would inhabit this bleak world alone?” It also alludes to a plagal cadence, which has traditionally been associated with liturgical music. This would imply a sanctified “amen” as the narrator bids his friends goodbye. Britten prepares this bittersweet ending at the start of the last verse, trading the harp arpeggios for a motive that expresses the ticking passage of time. The alternating “ticking” between hands becomes increasingly frenetic as the verse builds to its climax on “flown.” The harp returns from then on to usher the poet home.

X. O the sight entrancing

O the sight entrancing,
 When morning's beam is glancing
 O'er files array'd
 With helm and blade,
 And plumes in the gay wind dancing.
 When hearts are all high beating,
 And the trumpet's voice repeating
 That song whose breath
 May lead to death,
 But never to retreating.
 Then, if a cloud comes over
 The brow of sire or lover,
 Think 't is the shade
 By Vict'ry, made,
 Whose wings right o'er us hover.

Yet 'tis not helm or feather—
 For ask your despot, whether
 His plumed bands
 Could bring such hands
 And hearts as our together.
 Leave pomps to those who need 'em—
 Give man but heart and freedom,
 And proud he braves the gaudiest slaves
 That crawl where monarchs lead 'em.
 The sword may pierce the beaver,
 Stone walls in time may sever,
 'Tis mind alone,
 Worth steel and stone,
 That keeps men free forever!

Moore's song, "O the sight entrancing," based on the tune *Planxty Sudley*, is a rousing call to arms against the usual enemy of his texts: a tyrannical monarch. The language in the poem indulges multiple senses, conveying vibrant images and aural allusions, even the blood pounding in excitement for war. Once again, Moore glorifies the loss of life in battle in order to achieve freedom. Just as it is evident in his previous treatment of "The Minstrel Boy," Britten's disapproval is expressed musically. His arrangement carries the same jauntiness as before, this time expressing a more sarcastic tone, as the eighth-note misalignment of the right-hand accompaniment with the left hand evokes the feeling of clumsiness. This effect is in direct contrast to the left hand's pattern, which stays steady and true, like a drum who tries to call its soldiers into line. The awkward coordination continues throughout, despite the accented bass. At the end of each verse there is a wild interlude, where a melody is brought out harshly amidst clashing eighth-note patterns and a pounding bass. This interlude, as well as the minor second dissonances between the melody and the accompaniment in measure 22, displays

the unpleasantness and chaos of war. Even the triumphant C major chord that ends the piece cannot bring itself to alignment. This setting wields a harsher, cynical personality than “The Minstrel Boy,” but can still be striking when following “The last rose of summer.”

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Moore's Irish Melodies have undergone significant evolutions and reinterpretations throughout history. Edward Bunting's transcriptions of the melodies, Thomas Moore's English settings, and Benjamin Britten's art song arrangements have each contributed aspects of preservation and adaptation, antiquity and modernism. These numerous reincarnations have not only ensured the *Melodies*' survival, but also provided musicians with insights on how they can be performed. These perspectives are especially useful to vocal pedagogues and their students who wish to make informed decisions on how to interpret the *Melodies*. In academia, the Britten settings are used with regularity, often learned with no historical context. This document serves as an in-depth resource for the historical, cultural, and musical significance of these pieces. The hope is that it will equip performers with the tools to make informed decisions about their own performances of the *Melodies*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boydell, Brian. "Bunting, Edward." *Grove Music Online*.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000004324>.
- Browning, Robert. *My Last Duchess*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768/my-last-duchess>
- Bunting, Edward. *Preface to The Ancient Music of Ireland, Arranged for the Pianoforte*. Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1840.
- _____. *The Ancient Music of Ireland: An Edition Comprising the Three Collections by Edward Bunting Originally Publ. in 1796, 1809 and 1840*. Dublin: Waltons Piano and Musical Instrument Galleries, 1969.
- Cahill, Thomas. *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe*. New York: Anchor Books, 1995.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*. New York: Scribners u.a., 1993.
- Chinnéide, Veronica Ni (Veronica Kennedy). "The Sources of Moores Melodies." *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 89, no. 2 (1959): 109–134.
- Cooke, Mervyn, and Eric Roseberry. *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Davis, Leith. "Irish Bards and English Consumers: Thomas Moore's Irish Melodies and the Colonized Nation." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 24, no. 2 (April 1993): 7–25.
- Doctor, Jennifer, Judith LeGrove, Paul Banks, Heather Wiebe, and Philip Brett. "Britten, (Edward) Benjamin." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, 2001.
- Elson, Louis Charles. "Flotow's 'Martha'." *Modern Music and Musicians: Encyclopedia, A History of Music; Special, V.1* (1912): 455
- Flannery, James. *Dear Harp of My Country: The Irish Melodies of Thomas Moore*. Nashville: J.S. Sanders & Company, 1997.

- Johnson, Graham. *Britten, Voice & Piano: Lectures on the Vocal Music of Benjamin Britten*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. *The Harp That Once--; a Chronicle of the Life of Thomas Moore*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1937.
- Kildea, Paul. *Britten on Music*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Kress, Simon. "Hurt Into Poetry: The Politics of Sentiment in Northern Irish Poetry, 1966-1998." PhD diss., Guilford College, 2002.
- Lanier, S. C. "'It Is New-Strung and Shan't Be Heard': Nationalism and Memory in the Irish Harp Tradition." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 8 (1999): 1–26.
- "Memoir of Thomas Moore, Esq." *Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* 12, no. 349 (n.d.).
- Moore, Thomas. *Revised and Enlarged Moore's Irish Melodies, with Symphonies and Accompaniments by Various Eminent Authors; Characteristic Words by Thomas Moore*. Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1893.
- Nolan, Emer. "Thomas Moore: Irish Melodies and Discordant Politics." *Nineteenth Century Literature Criticism* 283 (2014). <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/H1420116768/LitRC?u=ncliveec&sid=LitRC&xid=19845e67>.
- O'Donnell, Mary Louise. "A Driving Image of Revolution: The Irish Harp and Its Utopian Space in the Eighteenth Century." *Utopian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2010): 252–73.
- Palmer, Christopher, Donald Mitchell, and Peter Porter. *The Britten Companion*. Cambridgeshire, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Patterson, Annie W. "The Characteristic Traits of Irish Music." *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 23rd Sess. (1897 1896): 91–111.
- _____. "The Folk-Music of Ireland: Its Past, Present, and Future Aspects." *The Musical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July 1920): 455–67.
- Pine, Richard. "A Guest of Cultural Politics: The Twentieth-Century Musical Legacy of Thomas Moore." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)*, Irish Issue 8, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 99–122.
- Poetry Foundation. "Thomas Moore." <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/thomas-moore> (accessed January 1, 2019).

- Rimmer, Joan. "Patronage, Style and Structure in the Music Attributed to Turlough Carolan." *Early Music* 15, no. 2, Plucked String Issue (May 1987): 164–74.
- Shields, Hugh. *Narrative Singing in Ireland: Lays, Ballads, Come-All-Yes and Other Songs*. Blackrock County, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995.
- Smyth, Gerry. *Music in Irish Cultural History*. Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009.
- Symons, Arthur. "The Poetry of Thomas Moore." *The Fortnightly Review*, April 1, 1905, 681–86.
- Travis, James. "Irish National Music." *The Musical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (October 1938): 451–80.
- "Trinity College, Dublin—Part 1." *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 1869, 1–8.
- "Wanderings in Ireland, Northeast." *Dublin University Magazine, a Literary and Political Journal* LVI (December 1860): 683.
- Warrack, John. "Moore, Thomas." *Oxford Music Online*. 20 Jan. 2001, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19067.
- White, Harry. *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770-1970*. Critical Conditions: Field Day Essays and Monographs. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 1998.
- Williams, Sean. *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*. Focus on World Music Series. New York and London: Routledge, 2010.
- _____. "The Green Fields of America." *Irish Traditional Music*. New York and London: Routledge, 2010.
- Young, Thomas Frederick. "Thomas Moore." Poem, n.d. Project Gutenberg Literary Archive.